

A BRIFE HISTORY OF
CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

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Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

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Church History
Senior A
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The factors which brought about the establishment of Christ congregation near Shields, Michigan in 1903 were the same as those which can be seen in many such instances today. The area was the home of several Lutheran families who felt the need to organize their own congregation. They had been attending near by churches in Garfield and Saginaw, but because of the distances involved and the condition of the roads it was often very difficult for the people to attend divine services. This was combined with the fact that those children of the congregation who were receiving instructions had to walk home in the evening through the woods from Saint John's Church in Saginaw.

Another factor was the fact that the Garfield congregation was decreasing to such an extent that it was felt that it should be discontinued. Later, the house in which the services in Garfield had been held was burned down when sparks from a train engine set it on fire. This brought the need for a new congregation in the area to a high priority. The members of the Garfield congregation were given the choice of joining either the congregation in Fremont or the one to be organized in Shields, which was also to serve the people in the area who had previously been going to Saginaw.

Early in 1903, then, Pastor F. Cares got together with several Lutheran families in the area. Pastor Cares was the Pastor in Fremont and had been serving the Garfield congregation. After several meetings for church services in different homes, it was decided to hold a meeting to which

all the families interested in forming a new congregation could come. On July 26, 1903 the meeting was held in the home of Frederick Nehmer. Those present at the meeting were: Frederick Nehmer, William Nehmer, John Oldenburg, Henry Schomaker, George Trinklein, Gustave Wenzel, Otto Kutsch and Pastor Cares. It was decided to organize a congregation and build a church. They also elected the following to be officers: John Oldenburg, George Trinklein and Henry Schomaker as trustees and Fred Nehmer as the secretary and treasurer.

This nucleus of Christians proceeded immediately to build their church. Mr. and Mrs. Wenzel gave an acre of land for the project, and after that things went along at a rapid clip. The trustees were instructed to get title to the land and to present plans for a building. The plans were presented and accepted unanimously on September 13, 1903. The building committee was comprised of: George Trinklein, John Oldenburg, Henry Schomaker and Gus Wenzel. The land, on which the church was to be built was cleared by the members themselves during the week of September 20th. The members also began hauling in the building materials needed. They built a house of worship that was completed and dedicated on August 14, 1904. Pastor M. Menke of St. Matthew's in Freeland was the guest speaker for the dedication. The love these Christians had for their God who had first loved them was clearly evident in the building of their church home.

Except for some purely cosmetic changes the church building remained much as it was originally constructed. In 1936, in spite of the membership slump and the depression, the church was wired for electricity, which was a major undertaking. In 1941 the church was redecorated. In 1947 an electric organ was bought. From its earliest days Christ Lutheran Church was a member of that organization which was to become known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In the early years of the church it was served by the same pastor who served St. John's in Fremont. Services were conducted every two weeks. Pastor Cares served in this dual parish from 1903 to 1918 and then took a call to Frankenmuth. The two congregations then called Pastor A. Zuberier who served the two congregations until 1921. In the early days of 1921 two congregations decided to get their own Pastors. Pastor Zuberier contacted the chairman of the mission board, Pastor J. Gauss of Jenera, Ohio. A special meeting with Pastor Gauss was held in March of 1921. At that meeting it was determined that Christ Congregation should call its own pastor. Pastor Gauss assured the members of Christ Lutheran that the Synod would give them financial aid until they could support their own pastor. Pastor L. Mielke was the first pastor to have Christ Congregation alone. He was pastor from 1921 to 1926. His successor Pastor W. Voss (1927-1930) was called upon to serve St. John's for a while when their pastor took a call. When Pastor Voss took a call himself in 1930 the two congregations joined again in calling Pastor C. Kionka, who served until 1940 and took a call to Dowagiac.

When the vacancy created by Pastor Kionka accepting the call to Dowagiac came about, the district officials decided to separate the two churches again and promised to supply financial aid for the support of their pastors. Pastor G. Cares was called to Christ Lutheran and served as pastor from 1940 to 1955. During Pastor Cares' stay at Christ Lutheran the fiftieth anniversary was celebrated. This event brought one major change along with it. German services which had been held in addition to the English were discontinued. The few families that had started the congregation had grown to number 349 souls by 1953.

In 1955 Pastor Cares accepted a call to Zion Lutheran Church in Monroe. Pastor Otto Drevlow of Fremont served as vacancy pastor for almost a year while five calls were sent out in succession to find a new pastor. Pastor LeRoy Lothert finally accepted the call and was installed on July 8, 1956, he served until 1961.

When Pastor Lothert accepted a call to Minnesota Victor Thierfelder of Bethany in Saginaw served as vacancy pastor until Herbert Kuske became our new pastor at the end of 1961. During the early years of his ministry we had more and more problems with our old organ, causing us to sing a cappella regularly. In January of 1963 a new Kimball electronic organ was purchased along with a set of chimes.

The time that Pastor Kuske spent at Christ Lutheran also brought about some changes in the physical plant of the church. In 1965 a planning committee was put together to look into expanding the facilities. At their recommendation

five more acres of land were procured in 1966. That year also saw the setting up of a stewardship program. It was started with the thought in mind of obtaining enough money to get a start on building a new church. In 1967 we obtained a loan and began building. Although we did not build it ourselves this time, we felt much the same way the charter members must have felt that first time in 1903. The cornerstone was laid on March 26, 1967 and on May 7 the new building was dedicated.

In May of 1970 Pastor Kuske accepted a call to Stevensville. Pastor Carlton Palenske accepted our call and was installed on June 28, 1970. He was Pastor until 1974. That year not only brought us our current Pastor, Gerald Schroer, but also a pipe organ was purchased to replace the old electric that had been in use. 1974 was also the year that we started looking into the completion of our master plan for the church facilities, that is an education annex which had been part of the original conception of the new building.

Christ congregation had always been one concerned with the Christian education of its young people. That concern had been one of the factors that had led to the construction of a school early on. The school built in 1916 at first was not geared toward general education, but was used only for religious instruction and instruction in the German language. The years 1926 to 1933 saw its first run as a full-time parochial day school. During that time Pastors Mielke, Eckert, Voss and Kionka served also as teachers.

By 1933 the enrollment had dropped to such a point that the congregation decided to close the school. The following few years brought an influx of families into the community and an increase in the congregation. The school was thus able to reopen in 1945 when Gerhard Cares was Pastor. He too taught in the school.

In 1949 a 1930 model school bus was purchased, but was in rough shape. It had a cloth top and wooden supports which were falling apart. This reopening of the school also brought the start of calling teachers from our Synod's teacher's college.

Some of the other high points of our school were the first year for a full-time kindergarten. That same year a total of sixty-six pupils attended Christ Lutheran Day School. This was a high water mark for attendance at the school in its old two room building. And though later years did not necessarily see that big of an enrollment, the need for newer and more adequate facilities began to be felt.

The master plan for the new church building had included a new educational facilities. In March of 1976 a loan was secured and ground was broken on the 4th of April. A special Easter offering that was used for debt retirement got the project off on the right foot. The congregation members also did much of the finish work themselves to keep the cost down.

1978 was Christ Lutheran's 75th anniversary and a very appropriate occasion to look back and see the very great blessings which God has bestowed upon His Church. It is the local congregations that are the primary focus of the work of the church.