

THE USE OF BRANCH SCHOOLS IN THE
NORTHERN ILLINOIS DISTRICT OF THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

John Hering
Sr. History Paper
April, 1989
Prof. Fredrich

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

501 N. Seminary Drive, 65W

Madison, Wisconsin

THE USE OF BRANCH SCHOOLS IN THE
NORTHERN ILLINOIS DISTRICT OF THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

At the beginning of the year 1864 it was reported that Chicago covered an area of twenty-four square miles, that it boasted 722 streets, and that it had a population of approximately two hundred thousand. A new skirt was advertised on the first page of the "Chicago Tribune" on November 17, 1864 - "A great invention in hoop skirts - a duplex elliptic or double steel spring."¹

It was during this year, 1864, that General Sherman lead his successful march across the South, from Atlanta to Savannah on the sea. Dynamite had just been invented and Mark Twain had yet to write the books that were to make him immortal. The majority of "Southtown" was still wild prairie, except for a few farms. On May 1, 1865, the funeral train bearing the body of Abraham Lincoln arrived in Chicago. "The casket was opened in the Court House and from 5 o'clock until midnight the people looked on the face of Lincoln. His countenance was somewhat discolored from the gunshot wound, but exhibited a natural and lifelike appearance more as if slumbering than in the cold embrace of death."²

Up to this time only two Missouri Synod congregations had been organized in Chicago: First Saint Paul's and First Immanuel. These congregations realized that children were a gift from God. They knew that it was their responsibility to train their children for life's duties and to prepare them for the life to come. The parents considered their children a

sacred trust and therefore wanted to train and educate them according to the will of God. The church followed Luther who urged "home-training." He demanded schools, not only secular schools, but Christian day-schools, in which all training is based upon the Word of God."³

The Christian day-school was set up as a voluntary enterprise. A local congregation, or several congregations, would vote to establish and maintain a school. This was done in a "very democratic manner, constrained by nothing but their own personal conviction based upon Scriptural truths."⁴ After the congregation had adopted such a resolution, they naturally agreed to send their children to that school in order to provide for their Christian training. The members of the congregations purchased the necessary grounds, built and equipped the schoolhouse, called the teacher(s), and made themselves available for voluntary support of the teachers or maintenance of the school.

- Increasing Immigration -

During the 19th Century the United States saw an ever increasing flow of German peoples flooding its territories. It has been estimated that some 5,000,000 Germans arrived in America during this period.⁵ (It was during this time that Wyneken wrote to Loehe for help). As these new-comers found a city in which to settle, they also looked for a church in which they could worship their Lord. It often happened that the immigrants were all immediately starting schools as they arrived in their new neighborhood.⁶

The first house of worship was St. Paul's Church. Its birth is recorded on April 12, 1846 by a group of both Reformed and Lutherans. This arrangement did not last long however,

since this church split in 1848 under Pastor Selle and four faithful members.⁷ By 1849 this small group of German Lutherans had grown into such a size that their place of worship no longer served their purpose. They built a new church. Already by 1863, under Pastor Heinrich Wunder (sent over by Loehe) the church had again outgrown its facility and built a new worship facility. This is not so hard to believe when we hear that from 1850-1855 75,000 German immigrants had settled in central and Northern Illinois. By 1860 Chicago's population had grown to 109,260 and 22,230 were German.⁸

- Need for Schools -

"When schools flourish, things go well and the church is secure....God has preserved the church through school." (Luther)

In 1854 there were 116 congregations in the synod and only 27 teachers. Walther, Wyneken and Loehe were very much aware of this shortness of teachers and they planted the seeds that turned into a teacher training school in order to fit the bill of demand for more teachers abroad.¹⁰

Up to this time only two Missouri Synod congregations had been organized in Chicago; Saint Paul's and First Immanuel. It was in May of 1865 that the the third Missouri congregation in Chicago had its inception. In the fall of 1863 First Immanuel, supported by its new Pastor, John Paul Beyer, established a branch day-school in a small rented building in Archer Avenue. Now, in May of 1965, eleven members of First Immanuel, convinced that the time had come to have regular church services in the Archer Avenue area (southeast of the "mother" congregation's center) requested their release to organize their own congregation. After the release was granted, Pastor Beyer helped this new nucleus of Lutherans organize themselves.

Trinity Lutheran Church was thus begun.

While First Immanuel was busy using their branch school to build interest in their community, St. Paul's was also active. For a thirteen year period Pastor Heirich Wunder held worship services on Wednesday evenings in a branch school-house built in 1857. These evening services attracted the attention of the Kohn family.¹¹ St. James, this mission congregation, called William Bartling in 1870. Like its mother church, St. James was also very active in reaching out into the community to provide Christian education for its children.¹²

From 1857 to 1870 St. James was maintaining three schools. One at Willow and Burling, another on Graceland and one in the church basement. After Pastor Bartling came to St. James, a branch school was established at Fullerton Ave. and High Street. Then, in 1881, another branch school was founded at Hayne and Wellington. To minister to these groups and the growing needs of the congregation, Pastor Ernst August Mueller was called as assistant pastor. The branch school ^{at} ~~as~~ Hayne and Wellington then developed into a new congregation, St. Luke Lutheran Church. (This church withdrew from IC-MS over doctrinal matters in the 1970's).¹²

During the years that Rev. Bartling served at St. James (1870-1897) he had baptized about 13,000 children. This is quite a staggering figure for a 27-year period. Yet, it does reflect the influence this congregation had on the community with its outreach through the branch school. "The system of establishing branch schools became one of the very strong instruments of church growth in the Illinois and Northern Illinois Districts."¹³

- A Closer Look at St. Andrew -

Trinity was responsible for branch schools in the vicinity of 49th Street and Loomis Avenue, a four-story brick school building ^{on} ~~at~~ Arch and Lyman Streets, a branch school on Farrel Street in Bridgeport, and one on Emerald Avenue was moved to 35th Court, near Halsted Street. In 1883 two more lots were purchased on Wood Street near 36th and a one-story school building was erected. This was the year 1883.

These branch schools developed into a number of flourishing congregations: the one at 49th and Loomis became Saint Martini (1884); the one on Bridgeport became Holy Cross (1886); the one on Wood Street became Saint Andrew (1888). It is the last of these churches mentioned above that I would like to expand upon. It is the church at which my grandfather, Rev. Martin Frick, served from 1940 to 1974. It was due to this branch school turned church that my parents also met.

On May 1883, three men, Pastor Ludwig Lochner and two deacons at Trinity Church set out to make a missionary survey of the general community in which St. Andrew Church is presently located. As a result of the survey, a one-room school building was constructed on Wood Street. Services were conducted regularly by Pastor Lochner.

Classes started on November 1, 1883, with Mr. W.F. Diener as the first teacher, and 35 children in attendance. As the membership grew they called Pastor William Kohn. We recall that this man's father held membership at St. James (pg.4). Pastor Kohn was the assistant Pastor at St. James when he was called to St. Andrew. At that time St. James had a membership of 1737 communicants and 650 parochial school children.¹⁴ Pastor Kohn, who was installed as St. Andrew on July 8, 1888,

began to teach the second class. The school grew so fast that a second room was needed. The members decided to erect a building containing two classrooms on the first floor and a large hall on the second floor to serve as a church.¹⁵

A second teacher was called in 1889, Mr. H. Eirich. At this time there were 105 children in the first room and 120 in the second. A third class had to be provided for. Mr. H. Hoppe volunteered to erect a building on his lot on the corner of 37th and Honore Streets. On November 11, 1889, Mr. J. Landeck was installed as the third teacher.¹⁶

The rate of growth in the school was nearly unbelievable! In four short years the enrollment was an astounding 225 pupils! The congregation decided to erect a church proper to hold the masses of people that were breaking down the church doors to hear God's Word. May 22, 1892, a fourth teacher was called and installed, Mr. H. Christopher.

It became evident that the church worship facility would not house the growing membership. After the members held their congregational meeting they were required to contribute a third of the cost of the new church. Pastor Kohn records that the people, who were poor in material means were rich in love for their Savior and had pledged their third of the required amount by the end of that week. The members had a grand worship center to the glory of God in 1892.

This growth in the congregation was attributed to the school and the impact it had on the community:

While serving as pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Rev. Kohn used the Christian day-school as an integral part of the mission outreach. The congregation was able to grow from 10 families to over 3,000 souls in two decades. It is indisputable that the parish school contributed significantly to that growth.¹⁷

St. Andrew Church was not going to put the brakes on a good thing. They could see how their branch school had grown, with God's help, into a thriving congregation. They also recognized their role in God's plan to save others in the area of 43rd and California Avenue. On August 19, 1894, a branch school was started here by St. Andrew Church. This branch school grew and became the rallying point of another young congregation, Peace Lutheran Church.

With the school going great guns in proclaiming our Savior's love to child and parent alike, St. Andrew hit its peak in the year 1907. There were 3298 souls and 2087 communicants. Here is a prime example of a church that started out as a mission congregation, and when new streets were laid out and houses constructed in the neighborhood cabbage field, it was looked upon as a great mission opportunity to win over souls for Christ. For this reason on the 50th Anniversary of the dedication of St. Andrew Church, the congregation remembered its first pastor and acknowledged that:

Under the leadership of this energetic, consecrated and gifted man (Pastor Kohn) the congregation was destined to become one of the outstanding congregations of the fast growing city.¹⁸

- Has the Role of the School Changed? -

This policy of the Chicago area churches was not active only during the 1800's. "In Chicago around 1890 to 1914 First Bethlehem "mothered" five churches by starting branch schools."¹⁹ But, today it is rare to find a church that would start a branch school. Why is this? Perhaps the role of the school has gradually been perceived differently by the average members of our churches. Does the school influence people as it did years ago? Let's compare these thoughts with

a quote from Pastor Kohn:

What influence did the Christian day-school have on the development and the growth of Synod? The parochial school was always regarded by Synod as a precious possession of the church, and as such was carefully treasured and nurtured. And why? Self-evidently for the reason that under existing circumstances it offered the only practical medium through which the command of God to "bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" could be carried out. But it cannot be denied that the carrying out of the divine command in this manner has had, by the blessing of God, a remarkable²⁰ influence on the growth and the well-being of Synod.

Surely no Christian would deny that the day-school is one of the greatest blessings for our children as they need to become more and more grounded in God's Word. So, why has the enthusiasm of the thriving school seemed to dwindle? Ken Young summed up one possible reason in these simple words: "It is done very seldom today, primarily because of the high costs of schools."²¹

I believe there are other factors involved. The congregational settings are much different today than in the years of the branch school growth. Congregations then did not have the outside distractions such as T.V. and VCR's to occupy their time. This meant entertainment had to come from your associations with your neighbors and their families. Another factor lies in mobility. For instance, at St. Andrew the majority of the worship service attenders did not drive a car to attend, but were within a reasonable walking distance. This lead to a more stable setting in which to build and raise the congregation's awareness of the community and visa versa.

We must stand in awe of our forefather's ability to unselfishly look into the future. Throughout my research it was a point of interest to hear that most of these Christians were poor. That is they were poor in monetary means, but rich in spirit and willingness to serve physically. Most

of the branch schools were built by the members who carried brick and mortar to build their schools. Their dedication and great work served to increase their unity and desire to serve their Lord God.

We can never sufficiently thank our God for the grace which he grants his church on earth. His grace will continue to be showered on his people until our Savior returns in glory. There is much work to be done in our communities. Perhaps the bottom line is not school or no school, but using what is there to draw people to the gospel that gives life. Yet, our schools certainly give us the opportunity to preach the gospel to perishing souls. May we never lose the eagerness our forefathers had in bringing this gospel to people.

- E N D N O T E S -

1. Trinity Lutheran Church Centennial Book - 1965, p.4
2. Ibid, p.4.
3. W.C. Kohn, "The Influence of the Christian Day-School on Synod's Growth," Lutheran School Journal. Vol. 57, 1922, pp.206-12.
4. Kohn, Ibid, p.206.
5. Walter A. Baeppler, A Century of Grace. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947, p.8.
6. August C. Stellhorn, Schools of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. St. Louis, Concordia Publ. House, 1963, p.213-15.
7. Rudolf A. Hofmeister, The Germans of Chicago, Stipes Publ., Company, 1976, pp.195-6.
8. Henry Clyde Hubbart, The Older Middle West: 1840-1880. Russell and Russell, Inc., New York, 1963, p.92.
9. Luther's Table Talks p.452.
10. Stellhorn, Ibid, p.10.
11. Albert G. Merkens, "Early Lutheran Settlers and Schools in Northern Illinois." Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.21, No.2, July 1948, pp.68-74; Vol.22, No.1, April, 1949, pp. 37-42.
12. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of St. James, 1869-1944.
13. Kohn, Ibid, p.102.
14. Statisitsches Jahrbach 1887, Concordia Publ. House, 1888, p.9.
15. "100 Years of Christ Centered Education." St. Andrew Luth. School, 1988.
16. Ibid.
17. Scott J. Meyer, Fifty Years in the Footsteps of Walther, Biography of William C. Kohn, Rev,Ed., St. Louis: Concordia, 1985, p.IX.
18. 50 Years with Christ 1892-1942, St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill, 1942, p.4.
19. Ken Young, No. Ill District, Letter received.
20. Meyer, Ibid, P.433.
21. Young, Ibid.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

1. Baepler, Walter A., A Century of Grace, Concordia Publishing House, 1947.
2. Frick, Mrs. Selda, Interview and Letter, Tinley Park.
3. Goldenes Jubiläum 1879-1920, St. Jakobi-Gemeinde, p.13.
4. Hofmeister, Rudolf A., The Germans of Chicago, Stipes Publishing Company, 1976, pp.
5. Hubbart, Henry Clyde, The Older Middle West: 1840-1880. Russell and Russell, Inc., New York, 1963.
6. Kohn, W.C., "The Influence of the Christian Day-School on Synod's Growth," Lutheran School Journal. Vol.57, 1922.
7. Luther's Works, Vo. 54, Table Talks, p.452.
8. Mayer, Harold M. and Richard C. Wade, Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis, The Un. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969.
9. Merkens, Albert G., "Early Lutheran Settlers and Schools in Northeran Illinois." Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.21, No.2, July, 1948; Vol 22, No1, April, 1949.
10. Meyer, Scott J., Fifty Years in the Footsteps of Walther, Revised Id., St. Louis, 1985.
11. Proceedings Northeran Illinois District, June 25-27, 1982. Dekalb, Ill, p.38.
12. Semensky, Pastor Douglas, St. Andrew, Letter received, 1989.
13. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of St. James, 1869-1944.
14. Statistisches Jahrbuch 1887, Concordia Publ. House, 1888.
15. Statistisches Jahrbuch 1896, Concordia Publ. House, 1896.
16. Stellohorn, August, Schools of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Concordia, Publ. 1963.
17. Synodal - Bericht, Mo. Synod, 1898, p.8.
18. Synodal - Bericht, Mo. Synod, 1907, p.97.
19. Trinity Centennial Booklet, 1965, p.4.
20. Young, Ken, Northeran Ill. District, IC-MS, Hillside, Il. Letter received.
21. 50 Years with Christ, 1892-1942, St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Chicago Ill, 1942, p.4.
22. 75th Anniversary Booklet of St. Andrew Lutheran Church.
23. 100 Years of Christ Centered Education, St. Andrew School.
24. 100 Years of God's Grace, Anniversary Booklet 1988, St. Andrew Lutheran Church