

IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
GIBBON, MINNESOTA

Supplemental History

Senior Church History  
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May 9, 1990  
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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
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The following is not intended to be a complete history of Immanuel Lutheran Church; the congregation's history is covered quite thoroughly in the anniversary booklets of 1935, 1960, and 1985, as well as in the 1968 Minnesota District Golden Jubilee History. The author feels little would be gained by repeating the content of those works, which are all quite similar to one another. This work is intended as a supplement to those histories.

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In 1884, Rev. Jacob Frey of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Moltke Township, was given permission by his congregation to conduct services in Gibbon. Similar attempts were made in the neighboring towns of Buffalo Lake and Hector; results were not encouraging and the efforts were discontinued. But the efforts in Gibbon resulted in the founding of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Although St. Peter's was a member of the Missouri Synod, Immanuel joined the Minnesota Synod.

Ties between the two congregations remained strong during the next 75 years. Pastor Frey served until 1889, when Rev. Jacob Baur became Immanuel's first resident pastor. In June of 1890, Rev. Baur preached for the cornerstone laying of St. Peter's new church building. He also served the vacancy at St. Peter's from February 22 through July 12 of 1891. Moltke's Rev. Herman Brauer served a long vacancy at Immanuel from 1893 until 1895, when Pastor Justus Naumann accepted the call. Pastor Naumann served St. Peter's during the vacancy from October 26, 1896 to January 4, 1897. Pastor Boettcher served Moltke's vacancies in 1906-1907, 1925, and 1943. Pastor Kesting served as vacancy pastor in 1954-1955, instructing Moltke's confirmands along with his own. Pastor Kesting installed Rev. Erhardt Roth at St. Peter's in January of 1955. Today there are still family ties between the two congregations, although spiritual ties ended with the LC-MS/WELS severing of fellowship.



Pastor Henry Boettcher came to Immanuel in 1904. He was to remain there for the rest of his ministry--47 years. He enjoyed living in a small community.

His daughter-in-law, Mrs. Leona Boettcher, who still lives in Gibbon, shared the following reflections about his relationship with the congregation:

"I remember he loved visiting members of the congregation. He loved to talk. He was invited out to the members' homes numerous times throughout the years.

"People were very generous. For example, a confirmation class presented him with his first refrigerator. The congregation gave him a new car at one time and many times gifts of money."

Many of the members were under the impression that Pastor Boettcher did not like the school. On at least one occasion he was said to have called it a "rat-hole". If, in fact, this was true, he was certainly not alone in his opposition.

What seems more probable is that he did not like the split in the congregation which was directly linked to the school.

Apparently the congregation was at first relatively united in support of the school. But as time went on, state requirements became more demanding. Many of the members were reluctant to change from German to English instruction in the school. The problem only became worse with the fierce anti-German sentiment during World War I. The 50th Anniversary booklet of the congregation says: "The language question caused much disagreeable discussion and became a sad impediment to progress," (p. 13). The Centennial Book also addresses this controversy:

"The language question caused much friction in the congregation. Some wanted to go over to English, but the majority insisted that all religious instruction be given in the German language. As a result, many members refused to send their children to the school."

Miss Zylpha Busse (Mrs. Zylpha Kramer) was the teacher from 1930 to 1934. She related the following incidents to me:

"I arrived in Gibbon by train at noon. Pastor Boettcher met me, took me to dinner, showed me the town as we looked over the places I could board and room. After I was rid of my suitcase, he took me to school and said, "You're on your own now, don't expect help from me;" and then he left. As we became better acquainted I gathered there must have been personality conflicts with one or more of the men teachers and the school was also a constant source of contention in the congregation and he was fed up with it all."

[During the Depression a number of schools in sister congregations were closed.]

"During the Depression there was talk of closing our school and it was mentioned at one of our school board meetings. I had the feeling if ever our school was permitted to close that would be its end. So I said, 'If it comes to that I'll teach for nothing, if someone will board and room me.' One of my board members said he would. Somewhat later Pastor Boettcher came to me and suggested that we both lower our salaries and the congregation agreed, so the school stayed alive. We started with 19 children the year I came and three years later it had doubled, thanks to the Lord's blessings."

These incidents seem to indicate that Pastor Boettcher really had nothing against the school itself, although he seems to have been distressed by the conflicts connected with it.

Another excuse used by some parents for not sending their children to Immanuel's school was that the students attending the parochial schools didn't measure up to the public schools' students. At one time this may have been true. Efforts had been made by teachers and members to modernize the school program, but little progress was made.

When Miss Busse arrived the school had none of the free teaching aids offered by the county. Most of the books were outdated. But she was able to acquire these aids; these kept her informed about what was going on in the public schools and helped her to keep her students on an even footing with those in the public schools. The 50th Anniversary book said of Miss Busse's years of teaching at Immanuel: "Under her able management the school attained a high degree of efficiency."

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Pastor Boettcher was a sports fan. He attended many of the local high school's home football and baseball games. In October of 1952, he was present at a football game, which took place on the field north of the Gibbon Public School. Four members of the congregation--James Micke, Allan Hager, Harry Berger, and Edward Lenz--played for Gibbon. During that game Harry Berger broke his leg and Pastor Boettcher died. Henry Micke, (father of James) who had some rescue training, was told by two men that something was wrong with the pastor. They took the pastor into the school building but were unable to save his life.

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During the pastorate of Herbert H. Kesting, many improvements were made. A new organ was purchased in 1954

and installed in 1955. A new church building, which had been under consideration since 1945, was approved. Ground was broken on March 23, 1958 even though at least 2 feet of frost was still in the ground. The cornerstone was laid on June 22.

Dedication of the new church building was celebrated with 3 services on March 8 of the following year. The first service of the day began at 9:30 a.m. It began in the old church and progressed to the main portal of the new church. The Bible and service books--both German and English--along with the sacred vessels were at the same time carried from the old church. The keys were handed to the Pastor, who offered a prayer before unlocking the door. The congregation then proceeded into the new church. After the singing of a hymn the Bible, service books, and sacred vessels were handed to the minister, who put them in their proper places. Services were also conducted at 3 p.m. and at 8 p.m.

A unique feature of this church building is the carved wooden symbols of the three members of the Trinity and of the Twelve Apostles, described as follows in the Dedication service folder:

On both sides of the cross we have the carved symbols of the Holy Twelve apostles, thru whose teaching and writings the Holy Christian Church was established so that this salvation could be transmitted to us. Here is a brief explanation of their shields:

**St. Peter:** His shield shows two large keys crossed. They recall how Jesus once said to Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

**St. James the Greater:** This Apostle's shield shows three scallop shells. The shell is a symbol of pilgrimage. St. James traveled far and wide preaching the Gospel until his martyr death 14 years after his Lord's crucifixion.

**St. John:** His shield has upon it a chalice out of which issues a serpent. Early writers tell us that many attempts were made upon this apostle's life. Once he was given a poisoned cup from which the Lord mercifully spared him. Hence the serpent in the chalice. He was, however, the only one of the twelve apostles who did not die a violent death.

**St. Andrew:** His shield bears the cross in the form of an "X". It is said that he was crucified on such a cross while preaching in Greece.

**St. Phillip:** St. Phillip's shield shows a tall slender cross and two loaves of bread, recalling his remark when our Lord fed the 5,000 in the wilderness, John 6, 7: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

**St. Bartholomew:** This apostle, thought to be the same as Nathanael, is said to have been flayed alive and then crucified. His shield shows three flaying knives.

**St. Thomas:** His shield shows a carpenter's square and a vertical spear. This apostle is said to have brought the Gospel to India, where he built a church with his own hands. It is said that he was stoned and shot down with arrows and that a pagan priest ran the dying apostle thru with a spear.

**St. James the Less:** This apostle's shield shows a vertical saw. After being brutally killed, his dead body was sawn asunder.

**St. Matthew:** His shield shows three purses, or money bags, reminding us of his original calling. He was a publican or tax collector.

**St. Jude:** This apostle, also called Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus, traveled far with St. Simon on mission journeys. Hence he is given a sailboat with a cross-shaped mast.

**St. Simon:** This apostle, the companion of St. Jude, is also designated as the Canaanite or Zelotes, to distinguish him from the other Simon surnamed Peter. His symbol of the fish on the book designates him as a great fisher of men thru the power of the Gospel.

**St. Matthias:** This apostle was chosen to take the place of Judas who betrayed our Savior. His shield is an open Bible and a double battle axe. St. Matthias is said to have been stoned and then beheaded after missionary work in Judaea.

The shields of the Apostles and Trinity symbols were carved by Eldon Nuessmeier, a member of the congregation.

Mr. Albert Dreier, a member of the congregation, died while helping to finish the interior of the church. He had helped with painting and tiling the floors. While painting above the bapistry, he fell off of a stand 14 feet in the air, landing on the cement floor and breaking his neck.

One of those who assisted in the cornerstone-laying ceremony was Pastor Erhard Roth of St. Peter's (LC-MS) in Moltke Township, the mother congregation of Immanuel. Pastor Roth was the preacher for the evening service of the Diamond Jubilee celebration, held June 5, 1960. In spite of the close ties between the congregations, Pastor Kesting related that Immanuel lost no members because of the split between WELS and LC-MS.

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Pastor Kesting was a man who could work with his hands. He owned a number of wood-working tools. When rust began to take its toll on his car, he repaired in an unusual but effective way; he described the project in this way:

"Yes, I did have an old black 1950 Pontiac. When it was about 10 years old the floor of the trunk started to rust out. Tried more things to fix it, but nothing worked. I put some sheet metal underneath as a form, used some rods and wire for reinforcing and poured about 2 inches of concrete on top. It looked real good after putting the rubber mat on top - no more dust leaks or water leaks. Two more owners had the 1950 Pontiac after me. It still ran for a number of years after 1963, the year I sold it. With the extra weight in back it had good traction."

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During the winter of 1966-1967, services at St. John's of Ridgely Township (the mother church of St. Peter's and the grandmother church of Immanuel) had to be cancelled due to the cold weather. Apparently the church was not heated well enough. The congregation's final service was held on April 2, 1967, conducted by their Pastor Martin Lemke, who also served Emanuel of Wellington Township. Following the service, a meeting was held for the purpose of transferring the few remaining members. Some were transferred to St. John's of Fairfax, some to St. Paul's of New Ulm, and some (13 communicants) to Immanuel of Gibbon.

The Ridgely church building remained standing into the

<sup>mid</sup>  
late seventies. The furnishings were removed. The organ was given to Mr. James Sonnemann. The building slowly deteriorated. Finally it was torn down. Only the cemetery remains at the site.

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Pastor Lloyd A. Hohenstein was installed as pastor of Immanuel on February 12, 1967 by Pastor Winfred Vathauer of St. John's in Fairfax, Minnesota. (The Centennial Book mistakenly lists this as having occurred on the first Sunday of February, 1967.) Among those who assisted with the installation was Pastor William P. Haar, who not only had baptized, confirmed, and married Pastor Hohenstein, but also had preached for the installation and ordination of Pastor Hohenstein at Grace Lutheran Church, Pickett, Wisconsin, on July 12, 1959.

Pastor Vathauer had called the congregation's attention to the pronunciation of the new pastor's name. But many still mispronounced it "Hauenstein"; this name was more familiar to the members--it was the name of a beer brewed in the nearby town of New Ulm.

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The increasing Christian Day School enrollment in the early 1960s made it necessary for the congregation to call a third teacher. Since the school had only 2 classrooms at the time, additional space was needed. In 1967 a school building committee was appointed to study the matter and to make a recommendation. An addition to the school was proposed at the voters' meeting in June of 1967, but this proposal was voted down. Instead it was decided that the 1st and second grade classes would be conducted on the stage in the church basement. This arrangement was used through the 1969-1970 school year.

By 1969 the idea of adding on to the school was again being discussed. It was still a hotly contested issue. The bulletin from March 9, 1969 reported: "The council spent much time discussing the matter of rumors, false reports, and gossip which is presently going around and must be stopped." The need for additional space was again emphasized when the council decided not to make use of the release time for grades 1 through 6 before there were adequate facilities for these classes.

When this issue came up for voting on May 12, 1969, those against the addition reportedly packed the meeting. This meeting was referred to by one member as "the worst voters' meeting in the history of the congregation"; there were still strong feelings on both sides of the issues. 97 voters were present; 52 voted in favor of building additional educational facilities; 50 were in favor of adding these new facilities to the existing building; 55 voted to take the money for the project from the Building and Improvement Fund.

As the men were leaving the meeting, one very elderly gentleman was overheard to ask, "What was that we were voting on?"

On June 23, 1969, the voters assembled to decide whether or not to hire an architect. At one of the voters' meetings in 1969, someone had predicted that the congregation would never get a 2/3 vote to finance the school. But when the vote was counted, the proposal to hire the architect was approved by a vote of 46-23--an exact 2/3 majority!

Along with the addition of 2 classrooms, extensive remodeling was done to the original school building. The cornerstone of the addition was laid on Thanksgiving Day of 1969; dedication of the addition and newly remodeled facility was held on September 13, 1970; Professor Milton Burk, then the Dean of Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, delivered the sermon.

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Enrollment in the school declined during the late 70s. Around 1980, the members of a neighboring congregation, Zion Lutheran Church of Winthrop, expressed their interest in sending some of their children to attend school at Immanuel. This soon became a reality. Today the number of children has increased to the point where almost 70% of the school's enrollment comes from Zion. The teacher of the middle grades was called by Zion. The school board is now composed of 3 members from each congregation, with the pastors and principal serving as advisory members. The school's budget is funded by both congregations in proportion to the number of students from each congregation. The physical property, however, is still under Immanuel's ownership.

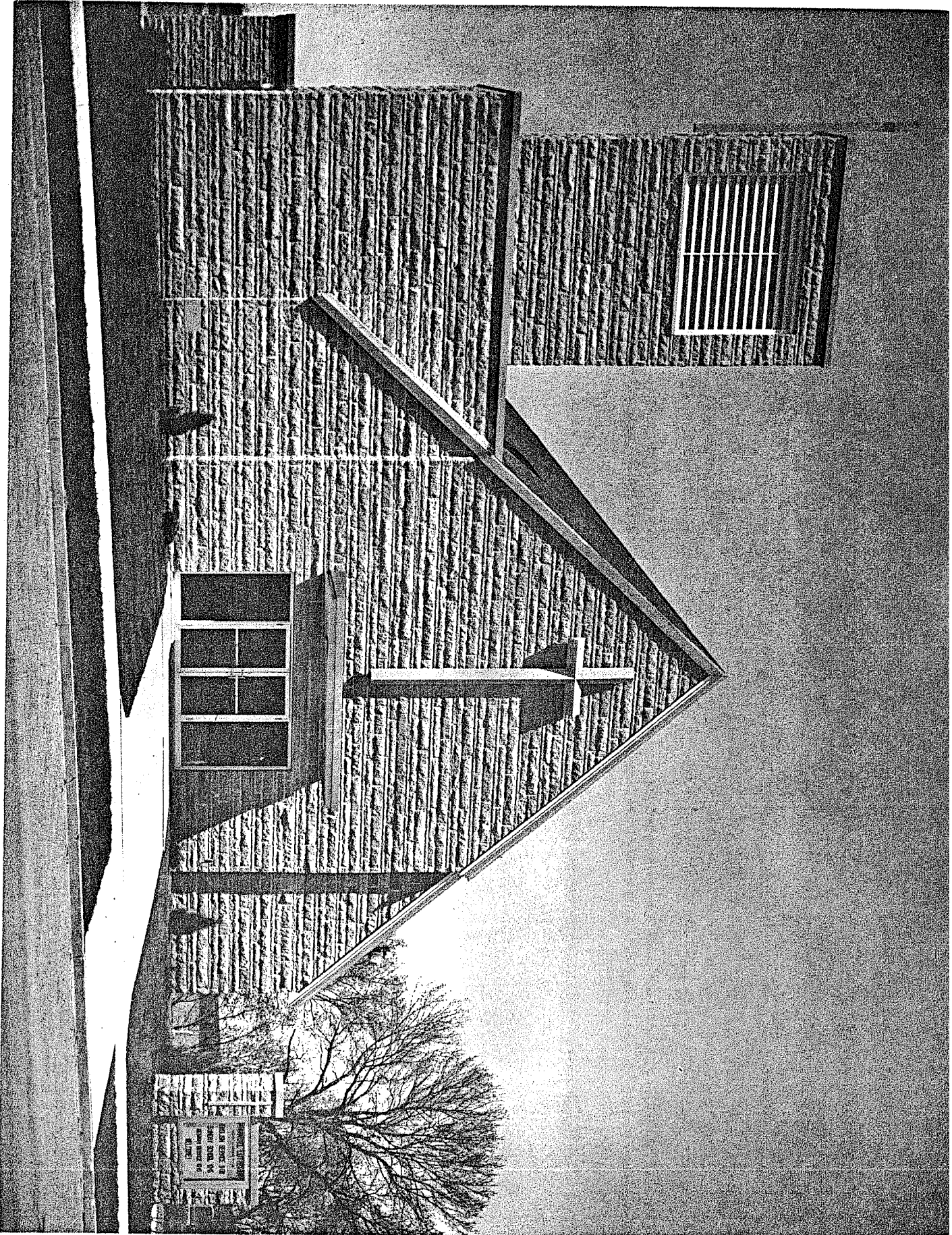
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The author would like to express thanks to the following sources for their contributions to this paper:

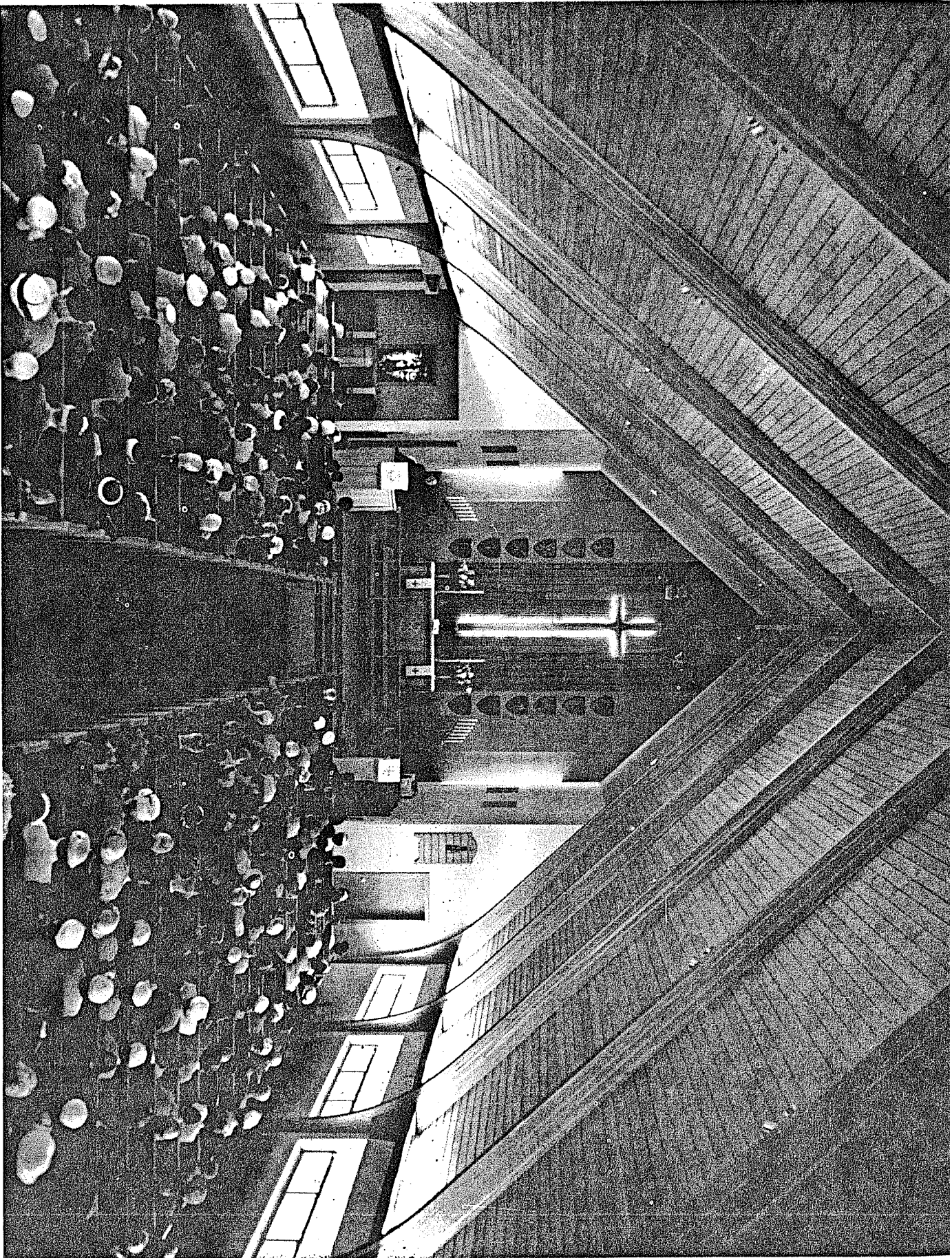
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|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Mrs. Zylpha Kramer     | Pastor Herbert Kesting  |
| Mr. & Mrs. Henry Micke | Pastor Lloyd Hohenstein |
| Mrs. Leona Boettcher   | Pastor Richard Kuckhahn |
| Mrs. Lena Dreier       | Mr. James Sonnemann     |

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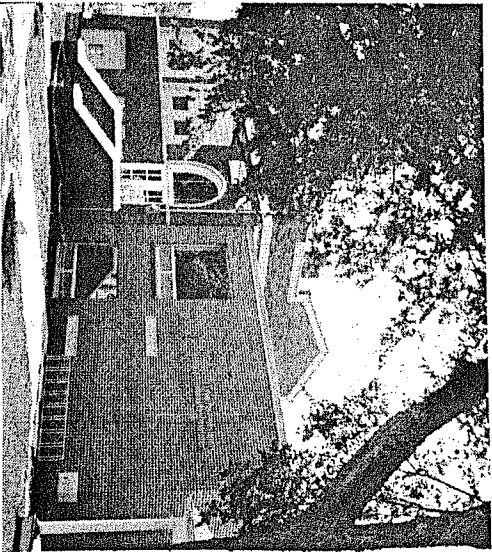


Our Present Church, Dedicated in March, 1959

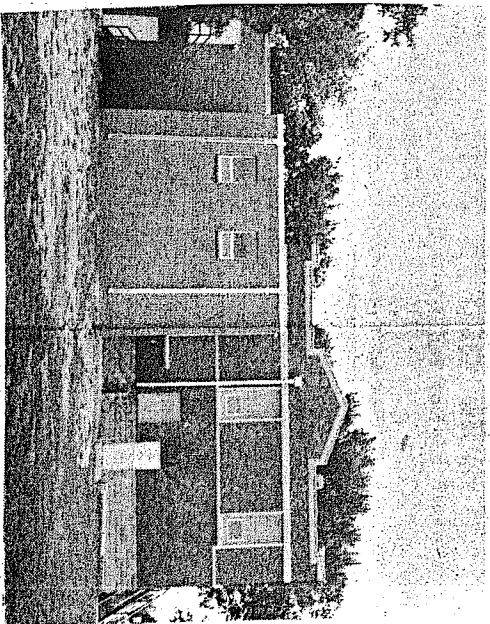


Interior of Present Church From Balcony

# Congratulations



*Immanuel  
Lutheran Church*  
Gibbon, Minnesota  
UPON COMPLETION OF YOUR  
Christian Day School  
ADDITION & REMODELING



WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE HAD A PART IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SCHOOL

## DEMING Construction

WE HAD THE GENERAL CONTRACT  
Fairfax, Minn.

## HEUER Plbg. & Htg.

WE DID THE HEATING & PLUMBING  
Winthrop, Minn.

## DREIER Electric

WE DID THE ELECTRICAL WORK  
Fairfax, Minn.

