

(Manitowoc, Wis.)  
FIRST GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND HER DAUGHTERS  
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## FIRST GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND HER DAUGHTERS

A mother and her child, that picture has often been used to connote the close love, the intimate relationship that exists between parents and children. And sometimes the relationship between mother and child is just that, love and intimacy. Sadly, however, sometimes the opposite is true. At times a mother and her child go separate ways.

In some ways churches are like people. They produce offspring. A part of them forms the nucleus of an entirely separate congregation. When speaking of churches, there can be a mother-daughter relationship. At times this can be a mutually rewarding relationship involving love and respect. At other times this can also be a relationship gone awry. Communication is cut off. Hostility emerges. Ill feelings display their ugly heads.

This is indeed the case with First German Lutheran Church in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. First German Lutheran Church is unusual. It's date of incorporation, 1855, makes it unusual due to age; its prominent role in early synodical history makes it unusual historically; its prestigious and important pastors makes it unusual in the gifts the Lord has given to her. But none of these things are what this writer has in mind. What makes First German very very unusual is that she is a mother. During her 125 years of grace, First German Lutheran Church has spawned all of the other Manitowoc churches. They are three in number: Immanuel, the eldest; Grace, born out of necessity; and Bethany, the baby of the three. These three children total nearly 3200 souls in membership, boast two Christian Day

Schools and owe their existence to First German.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine First German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Manitowoc and her daughters. In this purpose we will look at how she gave them their starts and how she was able to give them their starts. We will also explore possible reasons why for the most part the age of motherhood has ended for the churches of the WELS.

With the exception of Eve, all mothers were and are themselves daughters. So it is with First German. In 1846 Carl F. Goldammer entered the Rhenish Mission House at Erlangen, Germany to train for a mission ministry among the Germans of America. After completion of this course, the now Pastor Goldammer received and accepted a call to Manitowoc County, Wisconsin. In a letter dated January 15, 1851 and written to the mission society from Milwaukee, Goldammer explained how this transpired:

Until now I have experienced much, preached here and there, was forced to leave large fields where either a shoemaker or sectarians were gaining entereance. Oh, it is a pity no one cares about our German people. Last Monday I accepted a call to Manitowoc. They have organized a Lutheran Congregation because of me.

Pastor Goldammer doesn't specifically state just where in Manitowoc his new charge was. Actually it was not in Manitowoc at all but in nearby Town Newtonburg. This congregation, still in existence today--St. John's of Newtonburg, is the mother of the Manitowoc area churches, including First German. In 1848, Pas-

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<sup>1</sup>This letter found in Germany in 1948. It is included in First German's centennial booklet.

tor Goldammer began services in the village of Manitowoc itself. Being the only German speaking minister in Manitowoc, he attracted not only those members of his Newtonburg flock who resided in the village proper, but also a number of strictly German Reformed, whom he served with no compunctions in the union style so common to some German mission societies. In the spring of 1853, this little group in Manitowoc purchased land for a church to be built in the near future under the name, "United Lutheran and Evangelical Church of the Village of Manitowoc, Wisconsin." And so began First German Evangelical Lutheran Church. The name changed several times until the church finally was incorporated under her present name in 1860. The confessional stance of the congregation was given backbone by Goldammer's successor, Pastor Phillip Koehler. But despite the changes, St. John-Newtonburg's daughter came of age as a church in her own right.

First German's motherhood begins with the pastorate of Rev. Karl Machmiller who was installed on March 29, 1891. Under Pastor Machmiller, First German experienced steady if not phenomenal growth, began a school and felt the pangs of growing pains. The steady growth of the congregation and the burden, however joyful, of ministering to all the German Lutherans in Manitowoc, became too much for one pastor to bear. Gradually the plan of organizing a daughter congregation on Manitowoc's north side materialized. In <sup>the</sup> 1923 annual meeting, the congregation decided to call an assistant pastor.

On May 4, 1924, a Seminary Candidate, Theophil Vetzmann was issued a divine call to be the assistant pastor of First German

"who was to<sup>w</sup>ork primarily on the northside with the purpose in mind of organizing a daughter congregation."<sup>2</sup> Pastor Uetzmann served First German as an assistant pastor from July 19, 1923 (ordination and installation date) until March 1927. During the interim, plans for the new congregation rapidly took shape. A committee was formed to study possible sites for land acquisition for the new church and school. On July 22, 1924, an option was taken on eight lots on Manitowoc's northside. These lots were later purchased for \$6400.

First German now turned her attention to providing a worship home for her soon to be daughter. Plans were drawn up for a church and school and pledges were received in the total of \$56,888.85 to cover the cost of the structure. It soon became evident to the church fathers that the privilege of decision concerning the building ought to reside with those northside parishioners who eventually would comprise the membership of the new church. On April 28, 1926, forty nine men adopted a constitution, signed it, called Pastor Uetzmann as pastor and selected the name Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church for the new congregation. To this group, the amount of money collected for building was turned over. The number of transferred members grew from the original forty nine families till at the time of dedication it totaled 140 families.

With the new congregation legally incorporated, church construction progressed rapidly. On July 10, 1927, Immanuel

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<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the Dec. 2, 1923 annual voter's meeting

Evangelical Lutheran Church dedicated its new church and parsonage. On dedication Sunday, Immanuel congregation numbered 453 souls, 327 communicants and represented 158 families; 140 of those families transferred from First German. Her debt was small due to the generosity of the mother church. The labor pains were over. The oldest daughter was walking by herself. Subsequent history records a cleft between mother and daughter due to the "Protestant Movement", but that is another story.

As concerns the birth of her next two daughters First German may allegorically be said to have been pregnant with twins. Although both Bethany and Grace received assistance from First German at roughly the same time, they came into being at different times. Chronologically, planning for Bethany began at an even earlier date (1939) than did that for Grace (1940). However, because Grace was established as an independent congregation sooner, we will next proceed with her story.

As early as 1938, problems began to develop within Immanuel congregation. For certain reasons which to him seemed commanding, Pastor Theophil Uetzmann joined a group of pastors protesting certain actions within the Wisconsin Synod. In 1938, these protesting pastors, called "Protestants" were suspended from fellowship in the WELS. The majority of Immanuel supported Pastor Uetzmann. However fifty families severed their membership from Immanuel Lutheran Church. Part of that group solicited service from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and became Redeemer Lutheran Church. The other part of the group remained within the

Wisconsin Synod and formed the nucleus of what later was to become Grace Evangelical Church.

On August 4, 1940, a small group of worshipers were addressed by Pastor Walter Pankow, president of the Northern Wisconsin District-WELS. Appropriately enough his sermon began with the words "Fear not little flock." The little flock faced almost insurmountable obstacles. First they were indeed a very small flock, mostly members who had separated themselves from Immanuel because of her Synod suspension. In addition, part of those who withdrew from Immanuel had begun a church affiliated with the LCMS. Could this area, which formerly had been adequately served by one church, now support three?

On September 19, 1940, thirteen men met in a private home and signed the following simple resolution:

We, the undersigned, desire to organize temporarily as an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation and have services in our midst. As vacancy pastor, we call Pastor Walter Kleinke."

Grace congregation, although not yet known by that name, was born. She numbered 34 communicants and 6 baptized children.

A week later, the members of the new congregation met with the Board of Trustees of First German Evangelical Lutheran Church. First German expressed her support of this little group but because of her own involvement with the west side mission (Bethany), advised the group to turn for assistance to the Synod. On October 2, 1940, a meeting with synodical officials produced a pledge to aid the struggling congregation as a WELS mission. That same day a call was extended to Dr. Henry Koch who was then teaching at Concordia, Bronxville, New York.

The call was accepted and Dr. Koch was installed as the first resident pastor on December 1.

For some time the small congregation had held services at the Lincoln Park field house. By April 30, the congregation had grown to 75 communicants and was in desperate need of its own house of worship. But here a snag in synodical assistance developed. Funds for land acquisition and chapel construction were not available. The Church Extension Funds of the Synod were frozen.

Now First German, the mother congregation, enters the picture. With no synodical funds available to her, Grace congregation turned to the southside for help. It was estimated that \$15,000 would be needed for the building program desired and needed. Grace asked the mother church to underwrite the entire project. First German answered in a letter dated July 12, 1941 (cf. appendix 1 for a copy):

Be it resolved that our council meet with the council of the North side Immanuel Congregation (Wis. Synod) and that ways and means of providing assistance be worked out by the two boards, but that it be along the lines of the fifteen points recommended by the board. (cf. appendix 2 for a copy of the fifteen points).

Boiled down, First German pledged to loan at a low rate of interest to Grace the amount of \$12,000--Grace raising \$3000 on her own.

With the necessary funds at her disposal, Grace moved quickly. Land was bought, the building designed and on the cold morning of January 4, 1942--a diary entry records the temperature as -10 F.--the cornerstone was laid. By April the structure was completed and on May 3, 1942, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church dedicated her house of worship. Pastor L. Koeninger, pastor of



First German preached the dedicatory sermon. First German's second daughter had taken her first wobbly steps and stood by herself.

As we said before, First German already had other irons in the fire. Her aid to Grace had been of necessity. Her beginning of Bethany was by design. As early as 1939, plans were in the offing to establish a mission in the rapidly expanding west side of Manitowoc. As the history of Bethany Lutheran Church puts it: "The beginning of the present congregation was through the foresight and guidance of the late Rev. L. H. Koeninger and the congregation of the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Manitowoc."

After a short search for land, property was purchased in late 1940. A chapel which could later serve as a school was built and on April 20, 1941, services were held for the first time conducted by the pastors of First German, the Rev. Lyle Koeninger and the Rev. Armin Roekle who also taught in the Christian Day School. For two years the West Side Mission, as Bethany was then known, existed as a preaching station of First German.

On October 17, 1943, First German called a meeting of the congregation for the purpose of establishing an independent congregation on the west side of town. Attendance of about 200 showed the interest in such an endeavor. Then in the regular annual voter's meeting of December 3, 1943, First German reached the following decisions: 1) 58 families were granted a peaceful release to establish the West Side Lutheran Church--effective

January 1, 1944; 2) First German would contribute financial assistance to the new congregation in exchange for Pastor Roekle teaching in the Christian Day School till the end of the school year--50% of his salary for every half day taught and 75% of his salary for every full day's teaching--and First German would return to Bethany whatever the members of the 58 families to be released had contributed in offerings for that year; 3) Pastor Roekle would be granted a release to assume duties of West Side Lutheran Church.

On January 1, 1944, Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church was born as an independent congregation. Pastor Roekle, First German's assistant pastor, was called as the first pastor. Rev. Koeninger installed Rev. Roekle who in turn installed the church council. And Bethany stood by herself.

But First German's generosity was not yet finished. In a special meeting of February 4, 1944, First German agreed to sell to Bethany the property she occupied. For property valued at \$15,656, Bethany would pay only \$11,000; \$1000/year plus interest. In addition, First German's Christian Day School would be open to the use of Bethany's children at no cost for as long as needed. Under these generous conditions, Bethany was enabled to exist from the beginning as an independent self-supporting congregation.

So ends the history. These are the facts. In about twenty years First German mothered three Wisconsin Synod daughter congregations. She released from her own membership to form these

congregations a total of 198 families. She underwrote their expenses to the tune of over \$86,000, \$56,000 of which were outright gifts and were never repaid. She sent two of her assistant pastors to these churches as their first resident ministers--Pastor Uetzmann to Immanuel and Pastor Roekle to Bethany. In addition to this, she lost from her own financial support the offerings of those 198 families. These are the facts; the question which instantly arises is how could she do it? How could First German release well over 400 people, put herself in debt in uncertain times and yet remain strong and solvent herself? How could she release two of her own pastors for these congregations and yet serve her own people adequately?

Perhaps the answer in part lies with the shepherds with which the Lord blessed this congregation. The founding pastor of First German perhaps set the tone for all to follow. Rev. Goldammer was a man afire with mission zeal. Wherever there were Christians who needed to be served, there he served them. At one time during his ministry, Pastor Goldammer served eight congregations simultaneously. It was during the pastorate of Pastor Karl Machmiller that First German first became a mother. Although not expressly stated, the church records strongly indicate that the impetus for the beginning of Immanuel on the north side came from Pastor Machmiller. He was the shepherd who led his flock to realize that a daughter was really the only proper solution to the problem of too many people for one man to serve. Also notice something very unusual. In preparation for the beginning

of Immanuel, First German called Pastor Uetzmann expressly to the work of organizing a daughter.

"The beginning of the present congregation was through the foresight and guidance of the Reverend L.H. Koeninger." The author of those words from the detailed history of Bethany knew, humanly speaking, where the credit lay for that congregation's beginnings. After the retirement of Pastor Machmiller in 1928, Pastor L. Koeninger assumed the pastorate of First German. After such a momentous effort as the founding of Immanuel, both in people and funds, one would think that First German would have rested on her laurels. Yet about ten years later, in 1939, plans were being made to begin the work on the west side. According to the September 9, 1943 church council minutes, Pastor Koeninger announced what he called "a distribution of cards at the west side to organize a congregation there." Just what this distribution of cards was is unclear. It may have been some sort of canvass of Manitowoc's west side. But it is clear that Pastor Koeninger played a leading role.

As concerns the financial part of First German's role in the support of these three daughter congregations, there may be several reasons why she was able to be so generous. First, the \$56,000 gift to Immanuel was the result of a fund drive and private pledges. Although her people may be commended for their generosity, as a congregation First German did not play a part and did not pay out a cent. Therefore this amount should not be included in any explanation. And while \$56,000 in the economy of 1927 is a great deal of money, this writer witnessed a

\$10,000 single day Thanksgiving offering from a congregation that is much smaller than First German was at that time.

First German did, however, choose to indebt herself nearly \$30,000 to underwrite expenses at Grace and Bethany and that within a four year period. This is a leap of faith since it did not directly benefit the home congregation. How could First German afford it? There are several answers. Manitowoc Lutheran High School was not yet in existence, thereby eliminating the costly support of that institution from First German's budget. Also First German, according to records, did not have a unified budget. While specific numbers were unavailable, it may be surmised that whatever offerings were earmarked for synodical support were used for that, and whatever was not was used for local projects. Then if a local project inspired much zeal, there in all likelihood would be money to support it.

At one time, daughter congregations were commonplace. It seems that it was understood that once a large congregation became too large for one man, that congregation would begin a daughter in an area with a concentration of her membership. But now, daughter congregations in the true sense of the word are few and far between. Why does it seem that the golden age of motherhood has ended for our larger WELS churches? To attempt to answer that question, this writer will express his own opinions. He by no means claims to be expert nor is he indicting anyone, either congregation or synod. With that disclaimer, what are the possible reasons for the end of motherhood in our WELS churches?

It is fair to say that the chief obstacle to beginning a daughter congregation is financial. This same sentiment was expressed to me by a pastor of a large congregation who desperately wished to get a daughter started to relieve a problem of too many people for too small of a physical plant. The GBHM states its and synods's policies as concerns daughter congregations:

A daughter congregation is one established by a self-supporting congregation or group of congregations for which the mother congregation(s) assumes total financial responsibility, both as to operating subsidy and capital funding, until the daughter congregation is fully self-supporting. It is a firm GBHM policy that it will expend no mission funds nor invest CEF money for a congregation begun without prior approval of the GBHM. Where synodical funding is committed by the GBHM for the present of the future, there is no true daughter congregation.

Faced with the prospects of footing the entire bill for a mission endeavor, including the cost of land acquisition and chapel without CEF funds available--and this when many congregations are having difficulties meeting their own budgets-- it is a small wonder that any congregation would venture to be a mother.

Hand in hand with the unavailability of synod money for daughter congregations goes the ever increasing demands on the congregational budget. Most congregations large enough to consider a daughter support a Christian Day School. Many are the financial pillars behind the area Lutheran high school. Add to that WLCFS, Wisconsin Lutheran College, synod pension and health insurance plus their own home needs and an already stretched dollar snaps. The Lutheran high school and many other agencies are of fairly recent origin. During the days of the daughters, they were

not factors that needed to be considered.

Since synod has disavowed support for the daughter congregations and has stepped up her own home mission efforts, there is or at least seems to be an attitude of "let synod do it." When daughter congregations were the only mission work actively pursued, then the mothers put in the effort. Now however, synod is active in home missions and this writer feels that the attitude of many a possible mother is "let synod do it."

Is the age of motherhood over? Has it like clerical black for a pastor's clothes ceased to be? It is the hope and prayer of this writer that such is not the case. If First German is a fitting example, then daughter congregations can blossom beyond all dreams. Today First German consists of nearly 1600 souls. Her daughters are almost as large: Bethany-1400 souls; Immanuel-1100 souls; Grace- 600 souls. It is a fair assumption that not all these people would today be members of First German. Daughter congregations facilitate mission work. What is the answer to the problems that face our larger congregations? I don't know. This writer leaves that answer to someone much more experienced, much more expert, and much wiser. But it is his prayer that some way of bringing about synodical and congregational cooperation may again bring about motherhood in our WELS churches.

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# First German Ev. Lutheran Church

8TH AND MARSHALL STREETS  
MANITOWOC, WISCONSIN

L. H. KOENINGER, PASTOR  
1101 SOUTH 8TH STREET

July 12, 1941

Immanuel Ev. Luth. Congregation  
of the Wis. Synod  
Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Dear Members of the Congregation:

We wish to advise you of the action taken at our last quarterly meeting on June 8, regarding your request for assistance in the purchasing of lots and erection of a new church building.

Our congregation at this meeting passed the following resolution:

Be It Resolved that our council meet with the council of the North side Immanuel's Congregation (Wis. Synod) and that ways and means of providing that assistance be worked out by the two boards, but that it be along the lines of the fifteen points recommended by the board.

You have already been informed of the contents of these points.

We hope that we may have an early reply, and that arrangements for a joint meeting of the two boards can be made in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

First German Ev. Luth. Church

E. H. Waak  
Secretary



1. We endorse the proposition of the North Side Mission (the Immanuel's Ev. Luth. Church of the Wis. Synod) of erecting a church home, the total cost not to exceed \$15,000.00.
2. We shall stand ready to loan the NS Mission an amount not to exceed four-fifths of the total amount of the property, and hold the deed and mortgage to the property.
3. The N. S. Mission shall be held to pay interest on the amount at the same rate which we must pay to secure the money, and after the first year shall be held to reduce the principal annually, the amount of reduction to be fixed by agreement.
4. After the NS Mission owns one half the property they shall be given the deed and this congregation shall be given a mortgage for the balance due us. However, we shall expect the mission to refinance and assume full responsibility as soon as possible.
5. The NS Mission shall be obligated to pay for the upkeep, repairs, insurance, etc., of the property.
6. Our Church Board shall approve location, type and plan of building, and also the constitution of the congregation.
7. The Mission shall be held to join the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States.
8. The Mission shall be held, if its labors shall have our endorsement, to consider a parish school as part of its congregational activities.
9. The Mission shall at all times cooperate with this congregation in school matters.
10. The Mission shall urge its children to attend our parish school until it has its own.
11. We shall offer the free use of our school to the Mission for at least one year.
12. As soon as the Mission feels itself financially able, they shall offer to bear, or as soon as this congregation shall feel the burden too heavy, they may request the Mission to bear its commensurate share of the upkeep of our parish school.
13. The Mission shall entertain the idea of opening a parish school as soon as possible, beginning with the lower grades.
14. This does not exclude that idea of a consolidated schools may be given later consideration.
15. The Church Council shall be and herewith is authorized to borrow sufficient monies to carry out the above point two.

REFERENCES

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manitowoc: church records

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manitowoc: centennial  
booklet and church records

General Board for Home Missions, Home Mission Handbook. 1980.

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manitowoc: 25 anniversary booklet

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manitowoc: 25 anniversary  
booklet