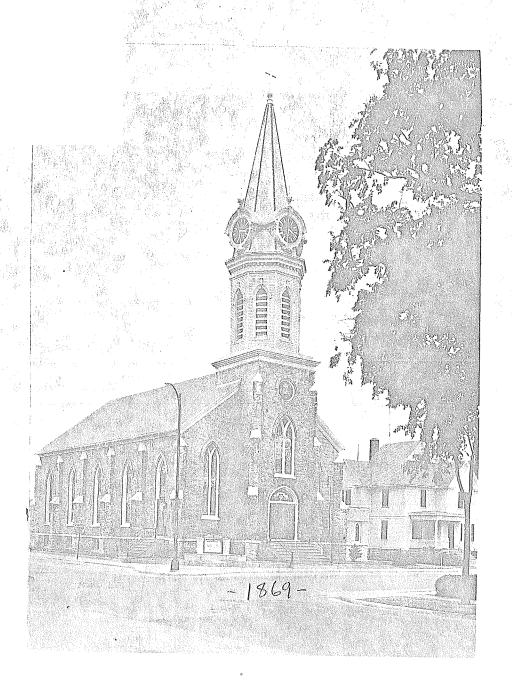
ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH FOND DU LAC, WISCONSIN



11531 N. Seminary Drive. 65W Mequon, Wisconsin

AN EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Church History 373

Professor E. Fredrich

Mark Johnston 4/10/78 I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it. Is. 41:18-20 (N.IIV.)

In its early history the village of Fond du Lac acquired the nickname "Fountain City" because of springs and many artesian wells. 1 But Wisconsin Synod Lutherans can call Fond du Lac "Fountain City" because St. Pete's Lutheran Church has been a fountain of living water, serving thousands with the means of grace and producing many workers for the church. Throughout its history it has existed for the eternal salvation of its members and use in the kingdom of God.

THE FOUNDING OF ST. PETER'S

St. Peter's Lutheran Church had its beginning in 1858. At that time Fond du Lac was in need of an orthodox church. According to the records, there was in existence a Roman Catholic Church (founded by Bichop Grafton)², a Methodist Episcopal Church (founded in 1839)³, a Baptist Church (founded 1845)⁴, a Congregational Church (founded 1846)⁵, and a Prebyterian Church (founded 1855)⁶.

In 1858 Pastor Gottlieb Fachtmann's mission work brought him into the vinicity of Calumet willage on the east shore of Lake Winnebago. 7 From there he moved to Fond du Lac for the first time. He was met by

^{1.} Mc Kenna, History of Fond du Lac County, (S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago:1912) p. 305.

^{2.} Ibid. p.312.

^{3.} Ibid. p.341-342.

^{4.} Ibid. p.338.

^{5.} Ibid. p.339.

^{6.} Ibid. p.337.

^{7.} St. Peter's , St. Peter's Lutheran Church 1858 - 1938, p.5.

two prominent Lutheran families, the Findiesens and the Grommes. These two families were "keenly interested in gathering the local Lutheran people for the purpose of establishing a congregation and were willing personally to give all the support they could. 90 Mrs. Findiesen belonged to the Episcopal church but her husband "was eager to lend substantial support to the building of a congregation of his childhood faith. 110 Unfortunately, the family moved to Green Bay shortly after Pastor Factmann's initial visit. That meant Mr. Gromme and the others would have to dedicate themselves all the more to the support of the congregation. And indeed they did.

On August 2, a Monday, the first service was conducted to over 100 people. 11 At the service it was agreed to meet at the home of a Fond du lac resident, Mr. Waller, on the following Sunday.

August 8th Pastor Fachtmann again preached. He was "welcomed by parents who on this day brought no less than ten children to be baptized, the oldest among them being more than seven." The Paster encouraged the people to form a congregation. The group responded by calling a meeting for the next evening at 7:30 again in Mr. Waller's house.

On August 9th the group met. Twenty-three men were present. We know the names of twenty of those who were present:

C.D. Gramme 14	Andrew Jurgens	August Sander	John Meyer
Fredrick Sander	B@ernhard DeSomber	Mr. Grobe	Carl Hundt
Fredrick Abel	Christopher Lutzens	, John Haberkorn	Henry Heider
John Jurgens	Henry Bruns		Ernest Reichmann
Max Kuchenthal	Carl Abel	William Schmidt	Carl Furstenow 17

^{8.} O.Nimmer and W.Schroeder, <u>Celebrating a Century in Christ</u>, (St. Peter's Luth. Church, Fond du Lac: 1958)p. 9. 9. Ibid.

^{10.} Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, (Sentinal Pub. Co., ST. Cloud, Minn: 1970) p.54.

^{11.} Nimmer and Schroeder, op. cit. p.10.

^{12.} St. Peter's, <u>1858-1938</u>, p.5.

^{13.} Ibid.

^{14.} St. Peter's, 1858-1938, p.5.

^{15.} St. Peter's, Geschichte (1908), p.3.

Pastor Fachtmann opened the meeting. C.D. Gromme was elected chairman and Fredrick Sanders was elected secretary. 16 It was resolved to meet again next Sunday.

During the week the men made sure the word got out. At 9:00 A.M. on August 15th Pastor Fachtmann preached to the group of Lutherans at the Presbyterian Church on Main St. and First(see downtown map of lot A, Fond du Lac p.17) just a block from where St. Peter's Church stands at present. At 5:00 P.M. on that same day they met again at the Presbyterian church to formulate a constitution. Forty-seven men were present to sign the constitution. 17 None of the other churches in Fond du Lac had nearly this number of constituting members. The average membership of the other five churches at the time of their organizing was sixteen. 18 In some cases that figure might have included women.

At the time Pator Fachtmann suggested making a united effort with the Calumet congregation. It was voted down, however, because of the large interest in Fond du Lac alone. Thus they organized into an independent congregation choosing the name "Evangelisch - Lutherische St. Petersgemeinde".

Of the constituting members there are a few that deserve special praise. C.D. Gromme was one fo the leading figures in the organizing St. Peter's. He was one of first to meet with Fachtmann. He was elected chairman of the congregation and he offered his finacial support to the Lord's service. He seemed to be a merchant with a well-to-do relative by the name of Achilled in New York and a brother in St. Petersburg, Russia, both of whom had promised to give their support to the Lutheran

^{16.} St. Peter's, <u>1858-1938</u>, p.5.

^{17.} Ibid. p.5-6

^{18.} McKenna, op. cit. p.338-342.

^{19:+}St.Peter's, <u>1858-1938</u>, p.6

church in Fond du Lac. 20

Fredrick Sanders, the first secretary of the congregation, "served the congregation uninterrupted on the church council for a period of forty years."21

Fredrick C. Abel came from Mecklenberg, Germany. In 1850 he came to the United States, first living in Chicago and then moving to Fond du Lac in 1854 22 which proved to be a blessing to the congregation. 23 To this day Mr. Abel's descendants are active members of St. Peter's.

John Juergens and John Meyer are also given special notice as serving the congregation with their time, talents and treasures.²⁴

The voting assembly decided to join the Wisconsin Synod on October 18th, 1858. At the same time they extended a call to Pastor Fachtmann.

The congregation still had no place for public worship so they made arrangements with the county board for the use of the court house and contacted the city for the use of the Marr street School building.

The two buildings were at their disposal without cost. The only charge was fifty cents a week for heat. The members were also required to cut the long cordwood into stove lengths. 26

Because the congregation now had to support a pastor, it was difficult for them to pay the fifty cents a week for heating. The congregation arranged to use the Presbyterian church immediately after their service so that the stove would still be warm.²⁷

Pastor Fachtmann had been there less than a year when he accepted a call to La Crosse. The congregation was without full time pastoral

^{20.} Koehler, op. cit. pl54.

^{21.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p.6.

^{22.} A Fond du Lac Newspaper, Aug. 21, 1906.

^{23.} Ibid.

^{24.} Nimmer and Schroeder, op. cit. p.10.

^{25.} St. Peter's, (建schicnte, p.3.

^{26.} Nimmer and Schroeder, op. cit. p.ll

^{27.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p.6.

services from July to September when Pastor Boenner accepted the call.

In March of 1860 St. Peter's went out on a limb. They brought the Congregational church building on the southeast cormer of Marr and Second streets (see map lot B) at a cost of \$700.28 The members provided an opportunity to show off their recent purchase by hosting the Wisconsin Synod convention from May 31st to June 7th, 1860. "The first assembly in Fond du Lac served in no small way to strengthen and encourage the young congregation."29

THE FOUNDING OF ST. PETER'S SCHOOL

The members of St Peter's had been interested in Christian education ever since C.D. Gromme offered to house Pastor Fachtmann in exchange for teaching his children in 1858.³⁰ Five years later, in 1863, St. Peter's made provisions for smore formal educational system. On the church lot they built a two story frame school house .³¹ The upper story was to serve as the parsonage. Pastor Kern (1863-64) was to serve as teacher.³² "It was a modest beginning and its facilities were of the most primitive type,"³³ but it served the purpose of indoctrinating the children of the church.

Two years later the school called Gustave Denninger as the first full time teacher. 34 The enrollment increased to such an extent that in the next year, 1866, Miss Magnussan was called to assist Mr. Denninger. 35

A PERIOD OF TESTING

When trials and temptations aggravate Christian life, it serves as chastisement to strengthen individuals, families or congregations

^{28.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p.6

^{29.} Ibid.

^{30.} Schroeder and Nimmer, op. cit., p.41.

^{31.} St. Peter's <u>1858-1938</u>, p.6

^{32.} Ibid. p.21.

^{33.} Schroeder and Nimmer, op. cit. p.12.

^{34.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p.6.

^{35.} Schroeder and Nimmer, op. cit., p.41.

in their convictions. St. Peter's went through such a chastisement in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. In August of 1867, Pastor Kern accepted a call to Ripen, Wisconsin. 36 During the vacancy which followed, the members of St. Peter's were approached to join lodges. "Secret societies began to establish themselves in Fond du Lac and sought to bolster their membership." 37 Many members were tempted to yeild to these invitations under the promises of business and social advantages. The congregation took a firm stand which resulted in the expulsion of those who chose to join the lodges instead of retaining membership at St. Peter's 38 The incident was an unhappy one but it served as an example of the way these Lutheran Christians served as faithful stewards of God's Word, even during pastoral vacancy.

Only five years later in February of 1873, the members discovered there were still members of secret societies in their midst. After brotherly admonition, the lodge members were excluded from the congregation.39

During this period, St. Peter's was also tested in finacial matters. In 1869, a new church property was purchased (map lots C,D,E) for \$3,700. Plans were immediately made for a building project. The ground breaking took place in February. The old property was sold for \$1,100 with the agreement that the school was to be moved to the new property. 40 After the school was moved diagonally across the street, a two story wing was added. 41

In May the cornerstone of the new church was laid and on October 24th, 1869, dedication services were held. The total cost of the church

^{36.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p. 6.

^{37.} Schroeder and Nimmer op. cit. p. 13.

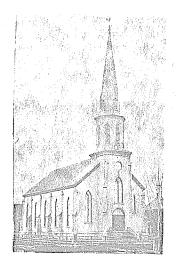
^{38.} Ibid. p.14.

^{39.} St. Peter's 1858-1938, p.8.

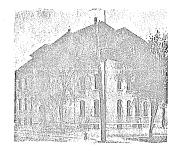
^{40.} Ibid. p.7.

^{41.} Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter June 7, 1958, p.2.

construction amounted to \$4,969. Plans also included a parsonage which was built in the fall of the year at a cost of \$1275.42



(The 1869 church)



(The school with the added wing)

And it goes without saying that financing such a project was anything but a small matter in those days. The congregation's debt now amounted to $\phi6000$, and it was a heavy burden for the members, many of whom were among the new arrivals in this country and had just found employment in the mills or factories or sought labor by the day cutting wood and doing odd jobs. Most of them were poor, and none of them had any amount of savings to fall back on. A way out of the immediate pressing difficulty offered itself in the suggested plan of issuing stock certificates to the members in \$25 amounts which, however, were to bear no interest. How could the people shoulder the burden? The only way to obtain money was to borrow it from the banks or such who had some to lend. And the customary procedure in such cases at the time was to get

^{42.} St. Peter's 1858-1938 p.7.

loans at what was colloquially called a "shave," where a certain amount of the principal was at once retained by the creditor, while the amount had to be paid in full when the note came due. In addition, interest charges amounted to as high as 10% in some instances. Neither would a creditor accept payment of a loan until due, for the lending game was a profitable business.

But with the fear of God and the love of Christ and His word in their hearts our faithful fathers personally mortgaged their properties and business places to provide the money needed by the congregation and subscribed the stock certificates to the amount of \$3350, thus relieving the treasury of a burden which was formidable enough to threaten bankruptcy. 43

ST. PETER'S BUILDS AND IMPROVES

The congregation did not stop with their initial investment but continued to expand and improve as needed. They were confident that the Lord would bless them with needed funds and confident that their members would give from their hearts and their treasures to keep the church and school in good repair, for they were dedicated to the Lord and His kingdom.

In 1878, the old "Jammer-Kommode" (the \$11 reed parlor organ) had seen its last days. The congregation responded by purchasing its first pipe organ for \$956. 44 In 1880, the school aquired new desks (\$432) and added the financial support of a third teacher. 1882 brought with it a new school building to accommodate the increased enrollment in the parochial school. The operation cost \$1,997.45

The twenty-fifth aniversary of the congregation (1883) spurred on new interest in improving and beautifying the church. For Christmas, 1884, the old oil lamps were replaced by gas lighting fixtures and by fall 1888 the chairs in the church had given way to pews which are used to the present. The following year, on Palm Sunday, a new alter and

^{43.} Ibid. p. 7-8.

^{44.} Ibid. p. 10.

^{45.} Ibid.

pulpit were "dedicated to the service of the Lord."46

In 1894, twenty-five years had elapsed since the church was built. The Young people of the congregation got involved in Christian giving by ordering a set of three church bells to be installed in the tower. 47 That same year, the congregation redecorated and rededicated their temple. 48 It is also a noteworthy date because the members of the congregation, in order to bring the Gospel more clearly to the English-speaking people, voted and approved of their first English service, 49 although such an action was likely to be frowned upon by some. 50

A new pipe organ was ordered in 1896 to replace the 1878 instrument at a cost of \$1,680.51

NEW ORGANIZATIONS - NEW PROJECTS

The turn of the century brought with it a continued interest in maintaining and improving the tools for the Lord's work. We see the birth of several organizations which existed for the low purpose of serving the congregation. They relate to us an example in Christian stewardship.

In 1900 the Frauenverein (ladies' association) was the first of the church organizations to meet.⁵² No official record memtions it, but one would guess the organization helped in the new parsonage that was built in September of 1901. The house was put up for a cost of \$\phi_3\$,100.

A year later it was decided to build a new school. The optimism of the congregation is evedent from the fact that they provided for four classrooms when only three were essential.⁵³

^{46.} Ibid.

^{47.} Schroeder & Nimmer op. cit. p. 19.

^{48.} Ibiā.

^{49.} St. Peter's, <u>1858-1938</u>. p.10.

^{50.} Nelson, The Lutherans in North America (Philadelphia: 1975) p.296.

^{51.} St. Peter's, 1858-1938 p.ll.

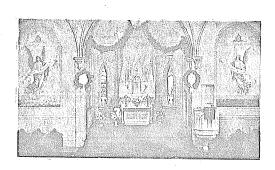
^{52.} Ibid. p.18.

^{53.} Schroeder & Nimmer op. cit. p.42.

They planned wisely, for in 1911 a fourth class was added.

1908 was to be their Golden Aniversary. Preparations had to be made. The attendance at services were getting to the point of overflow. The frauerverein took the bull by the horns and offered to give their financial support in enlarging the balcony. The Young People's Society are recorded as furnishing the necessary pews for the project. The result of the endeavor accommodated some 200 more people. The men of the congregation took on the major responsibility of undertaking a thorough renovation process. 54

The following paragraph describes the dedication that the total congregation had in projects such as these:



The decoration and rebuilding of the defective ceiling was done by the Associated Artists of Milwaukee. New windows were installed, an additional furace set up, and the ventilating system rearranged. A new roof was also laid and the gas fixtures, now antiquated, replaced by electric chandeliers. The costs of renovating, amounting to \$3800, were made up through a collection, while the Young People's Society,

the Frauenverein, the school children, and individuals paid for windows and carpets and the choirs had the publit and altar refinished. During the four month renovating process the services were held in the school hall. On June 28, 1908 the newly beautified church was rededicated and the people rejoiced in the Lord who had blessed the undertaking.55

On August 16th, the congregation joyfully celebrated fifty years of existence. The thoughts of that day must have reflected the ups and downs of the previous half century. The congregation had good reason to give thanks, for until that time, the congregation baptized 2,756, confirmed 1,430 and married 586 couples; the 1908 membership had grown to 1,145

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^{54.} St. Peter's <u>1858-1938</u> p.12.

^{55.} Ibid.

communicants with 1,650 souls. 56 They also had good reason to give thanks for the chastisement with which they grew into a strong church body.

Another such testing came less than six weeks after the anniversary service. On September 25th, "the Fond du Lac fire" almost turned their labors of love into ashes. The following is a description given by the centental yearbook:

The fire began about 11:00 o'clock and was not brought under control until 3:30 A.M. but in that time it had consumed completely two churches, two dwellings, and a garage where it had its start. Grant School suffered damage of \$12,000 and our church, just newly decorated and rededicated, also caught burning embers through the air, and it was not long before one of these lodged halfway up in the steeple and started a blaze. It could have been uput out with little effort had a pail of water been at hand. The Alarm sounding forth this night as well as the fiery glow over the city brought together many people who were eager to help the overburdened fire squads. Members came and cried to God for help, did what they could to pour pails of water to prevent the spread of the fire and, with God's help, saved the building proper, though the tower itself was a complete loss. The interior of the church was also ruined and the loss to the church ran as high as \$17,000. The congregation, though saddened through the loss, did not permit itself to get discouraged but set about at once to rebuild the spire and finished the work before the year was over. A rededication took place in January of 1909.

ST. PETER S - A TEN TALENT CONGREGATION

Christ once told a parable about a rich man who went on a long journey. He left his stewards in charge of his money. To one steward he left five talents, to another he left two, to another he left one. Upon his return he found that the five talent steward had become a ten talent steward. The two talent steward had become a four talent steward and the one talent steward was unproductive. The Lord was instructing

^{56.} St. Peter's, Geschichte, p.14.

^{57.} Schroeder & Nimmer, op. cit. pp.21-22.

his disciples to use the blessings God has given them.

As we have seen, St. Peter's was tremendously blessed in the first five decades of its existence. During the second five decades, it used those blessings to the glory of God and edification of the church.

On November 2, 1913 an evelope system was used in collecting the church offerings. By December, 1914, the stewardship committee reported that all the debts were paid.⁵⁹

The church in turn used their financial strength to benefit the congregation. In 1916, a sixty foot lot (see land map p.17 - lot F) was purchased for additional playground space for the school children.

Two years later the congregation abolished the tuition for all children whose parents were members of the congregation. 60

Although there was no room in the existing school building, a fifth class was added in 1921. The crowded class rooms can be understood when, in the annual meeting of the congregation in 1921, it was reported that there was an enrollment of 315 in the school and as many as eighty-five pupils in one class. 61

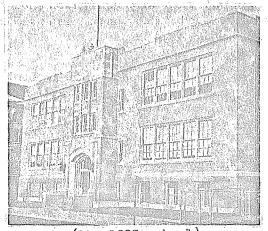
Naturally, building plans were called for. Additional land was bought (see land map p.17 - lot G) and ground was broken on March 27, 1925.

The cornerstone was laid on April 26th and the building dedicated on November 8, 1925. Rev. G. E. Bergemann (Pastor 1899-1947) reminded St. Peter's Congregation that the building of the school is not a scrifice but a willing debt which we owe to God, that the church is taking "the

^{59.} St. Peter's, <u>1858-1938</u>, p.13.

^{60.} Schroeder & Nimmer, op. cit. p.42.

^{61.} Ibid. p.43.



(The 1925 school)

offensive and building a Zion that will surely grow as the leadership of our Judge, Lawgiver, and King is reverently and courageously followed."62

Moving into the new build meant The congregation used more space. the opportunity to sart a nineth grade. Thus St. Peter's became the founding

congregation of the Winnebago Lutheran Academy. The additional room in the new grade school building was equipped by C. J. Hinn and Herman Michler. 63

The next year, 1926, congregations of the Winnebago Pastoral Conference joined together to promote the young high school and suggested the old school building be used for the remaining three grades. 64



R. Sievert

H. J. Vogel

H. Bierwagen

(Academy faculty, 1938)

After such undertakings, the congregation that had been debt-free in 1914 had within eleven years plunged back into a debt of over \$61,000.65 The first effort at reducing the debt was made on Pentecost, May 19, 1929 when the congregation was asked to make a voluntary altar

^{62.} The Daily Reporter, April 27, 1925 63. Schroeder & Nimmer op. cit. p.49.

^{64.} Ibid.

^{65.} Ibid. p.23.

offering."66 They relieved the debt by \$21,000 on that day and within three weeks increased that figure to \$24,000.67

The reduction of the debt helped to revive the spirits of the members who in that same year had to face the beginning of the Great Depression. There were those faithful stewards who were grieved when they found it impossible to support the Lord's work.

Members, who had lost their employment appeared before the church council to explain that they could not remit the church dues that were required to carry on the work of the congregation or, in tears, stated that they could contribute only a small portion. 68

Even in the depression years of the thirties, St. Peter's gave of what little they had and were able to constantly reduce the debt. 69

1943 was a date that brought true joy into the hearts of the people of St. Peter's. A debt of \$7,856.70 remained to be paid. Penticost Sunday, June 13th, was again designated for the purpose of relieving this debt. Immediately after lunch a large force of vulunteers met at the school. At one o'clock they spread out in various directions to visit the members. Their slogan was "Debt-free by Three." When all the stewards returned and the money was counted, it totaled exactly \$7,860, in other words, the people had collected \$3.60 over and above the amount of the debt. "Everyone felt the hand of the Lord was active in the debt reduction campaign in permitting the debt to be covered by such a close margin. "70 They now were debt-free and the investments of their fathers had paid off. They now had a well constructed church, a large parsonage and two school buildings.

^{68.} Ibid. p.24.

^{69.} Ibid.

^{70.} Ibid. p.27.

^{71.} Ibid. p.51.

But the Lord usually does not permit His stewards to become lazy. So it was with St. Peter's. In 1946 it was clear that the old school building lacked modern conveniences and had limited space. Plans for a new high school building were drawn up. The Winnebago Lutheran Academy Association together with a group of interested individuals began a building fund. The With the initial funds they purchased twelve acres of land on East Merrill Avenue in Fond du Lac which was about one and a half miles from St. Peter's.

Those interested people were ready for a building. But the Lord seemed to indicate that more hearts for higher Christian Education must still be moved.72

Besides the poor school facilities of the Academy, there were 152 students enrolled in the Academy. On May 22nd, another all-out effort was made to solicit money for the building. Ten congregations joined St. Peter's in raising \$165,000. St. Peter's Congregation again demonstrated their faith in Christian education by subscribing \$71,000 of the total amount."73

Although the May collection had to be considered a success, building had to be postponed again because such a big project required a great deal of money. The congregations were now asked to borrow money to make building possible. Six of the congregations responded. St. Peter's borrowed \$81,242.91 of the total \$123,406.21.74

Up until now the association had been made up of individuals.

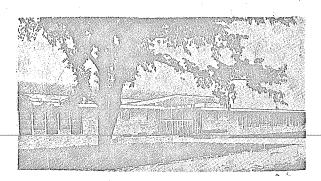
^{71.} Ibid. p.51.

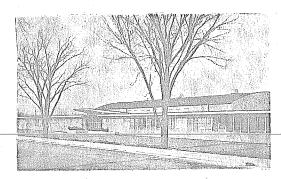
^{72.} Ibid. p.50.

^{73.} Ibid. p.51.

^{74.} Ibid.

It was evident that there would have to be an association of congregations to gain borrowing power. This was done and the building commenced at a cost of \$326,000. ⁷⁵ The building was completed in 1955 with classes beginning in that year. ⁷⁶ The school grew to where the student body presently numbers 278; there are fifteen full-time teachers and four part-time teachers. ⁷⁷ To date the bulk of the financial support comes from members of St. Peter's.





(The New Academy Building)

This congregation in Fond du Lac is truly an example of Christian stewardship. It is a fountain of living water, serving hundreds with the means of grace. And its history presents a story of God's grace and blessing.

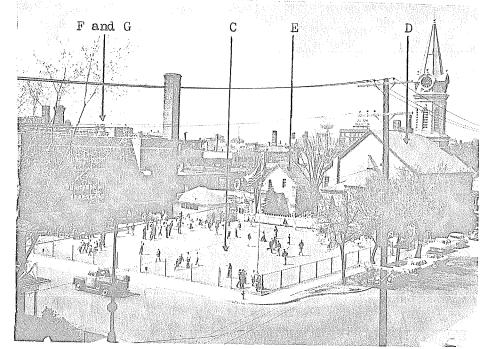
^{75.} Ibid.

^{76.} Ibid. p.52.

^{77. 1978} statistics as reported by Rev. Karl Gurgel, pastor of St. Peter's, Fond du Lac (1960-present).

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Land Map - Downtown Fond du Lac



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Rev. Karl Gurgel (Pastor - St. Peter's 1960-present)

Miss Margret Michler (Granddaughter of Fredrick Abel)

Miss Edna Schujahn
(A member of the congregation for about seventy-five years)