

A HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTIONS AT ST. JOHN'S  
ENGLISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN PARDEEVILLE, WISCONSIN

by

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A HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTIONS AT ST. JOHN'S  
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I became interested in this topic during the past year while I served as vicar at St. John's from August 1989 through August 1990. I was privileged to be the first man to vicar at this congregation. The advent of a vicar occasioned some changes in the forms of ministry in the congregation. One such change was the restructuring of confirmation instructions.

As one might expect, changes in this area brought about much interest and conversation. As I talked with individuals about this topic I became interested in how things "used to be done." I recognize that "We've always done it that way," is an overstatement. Determining what is overstatement and what is not became an interesting question. Therefore, I wanted to know how things actually were done. Spurred on by that interest I present this paper.

Please recognize that the author has only known St. John's congregation for one year. I was not physically present for well over ninety percent of St. John's history. Much of his history is based on church records as they are noted in the paper. However, I am also relying on the memory of people who were there. Due to the broad scope of this paper, many of these memories have not been sufficiently substantiated by a number of eyewitnesses. Therefore what I have written may be revised by eyewitnesses who had a different perspective of the events covered in this paper. In this paper I have put together the

information which was made available to me as faithfully as I am able .

In preparing this paper a few constants became very apparant to me. Holy Scripture has always been at the center of all confirmation instructions at St. John's. The editions of the Catechism, and Bible history books have varied but they have all made use of Scripture rather than concentrating on more worldly topics. Thirteen has always been a median age of young confirmands. Although there have been confirmands as old as sixteen and possibly as young as eleven, wherever possible thirteen has been the choice age for confirmation. Confirmation also has not been neglected for long periods of time. Except for a one-time three year break due to a vacancy, confirmation has been held every year or two years since 1899.

#### I. The Early Years - 1895-1910

According to the fiftieth anniversary bulletin, St. John's was organized on November 17, 1895. Although the same bulletin also dates the beginning of Sunday School in that same year. The seventy-fifth anniversary booklet had placed the beginning of Sunday School in 1905. The 1895 date for Sunday School appears to be a misprint. (The date is inserted out of chronological order in the fiftieth anniversary bulletin history. The revised date also fits with the minutes of 1905. There are no council minutes recorded in 1895 except for the constitution itself.)

The congregation was served for three years by Pastor F. Koch from Randolph. No confirmations were recorded in St. John's records from Pastor Koch's years. (If anyone from Pardeeville

was confirmed in these first years, it may be recorded in Randolph or Cambria.)

In 1898 Pardeeville, Cambria, and Doylestown organized as a tri-parish. The parsonage was located in Cambria. Services in Pardeeville were held at the rented Presbyterian church. The tri-parish called Pastor W. Beidenweg. (J. P. Koehler mentions a W. Beidenweg from Hannover who had taught at Northwestern during a vacancy in 1893.) Pastor Beidenweg served St. John's for a short time beginning July 10, 1898.

In January 1899, Candidate F. Brockman was ordained and installed as the new pastor. He had been a student assistant to Pastor Beidenweg. (One might say that Candidate Brockman was the first "vicar.")

The first confirmation class was confirmed four months later on Easter Sunday, April 2, 1899. There were five young people in the class ranging from thirteen to fifteen years of age. Two years later, on Easter Sunday, April 7, 1901 six were confirmed. Their ages similarly ranged from thirteen to fifteen. The oldest of this group was one month younger than the youngest person in the previous class. Thus already at this early date, all the children of a particular age group were confirmed at the same time.

In 1902 Pastor Brockman was succeeded by another candidate, B. Gladosch. The fiftieth anniversary bulletin mentions that "In 1902 during the pastorate of Rev. B. Gladosch, the congregation erected its own House of Worship."

The seventy-fifth anniversary booklet states, "In a meeting

August 31, 1902, it was resolved 'to begin holding school in May 1903.' This could have referred to 'summer school.'" There is some confusion in my mind whether "school," "summer school," and the confirmation class are one and the same. I am speculating when I say that I think the course was an all day everyday course which lasted three months as occurred ten years later. Confirmation was held in the fall that year. A class of nine students, ages twelve to fifteen, were confirmed on August 16, 1903, the tenth Sunday after Trinity.

Pastor Gladosch recorded the confirmation class of 1903. The minutes are difficult to read but the September 6, 1903 minutes mention Pastor Gladosch for the last time with the date August 25, 1903 and the place, "north Milwaukee." I take these to be the facts of his move from Pardeeville. The next Pastor, A. Ph. Pankow was first called in September 1903.

Pastor Pankow served St. John's for eight years and confirmed three childrens' classes. He is first mentioned by name in the minutes of September 19, 1903. In his first class, eight young people were confirmed. The date of this confirmation was April 16, Palm Sunday, 1905. In this class four were in the twelve to fifteen year old age group and four were in the sixteen to nineteen year old age group. The older group was the same age as the members of the class of 1903. I don't know why these classes overlapped.

On July 16, 1905, twenty year old Martha Becker became the first adult confirmed at St. John's. The seventy-fifth anniversary booklet records that in the following summer, August

1905, Sunday School began.

In 1906, three children were confirmed at the Cambria parsonage. They were confirmed on Palm Sunday of that year by Pastor Pankow. All three were in the thirteen to fifteen year old range.

Two years later, a group was confirmed. They were fourteen to sixteen years of age. The nine members confirmed April 12, 1908 were all younger than the members of the 1906 class. Thus these classes did not overlap. This class was recorded by Pastor Pankow. Pastor Pankow left in the fall of 1910. Pastor O.H. Koch served the vacancy.

## II. The KIRST Pastorate - 1911-1915

In January 1911, Pastor Leonard KIRST was called. He served for four years and confirmed three classes. All three were rather large classes. All three ranged in age from twelve to sixteen years. There was a considerable overlap in ages at this time. The first class, confirmed in the fall of Pastor KIRST's first year, has the distinction of having the latest confirmation date in the history of St. John's, September 17.

Pastor KIRST's second class was confirmed on June 29, 1913. There were thirteen children in this class. I had the privilege of interviewing two members of this class. Hermine (Manthey) Kreger and Harry Fredrick are still members of St. John's.

From their combined reminiscences I have put together an idea of their class. Mr. Fredrick remembers being pulled from school in March to attend Confirmation Class. He made up the schooling at a later date. He was one of the younger members of the class

and Mrs. Kreger was one of the older members of the class.

Both Mr. Fredrick and Mrs. Kreger remember that they walked to the church everyday for a number of months just as they would have for school. Mrs. Kreger mentions that class was held in the back two pews of the church on both sides of the aisle. She also recalls the time of class as being 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

The materials used were pencil, paper, German Bible and German Catechism. The class included the Catechism, Bible study, hymn work and some church history. Written homework and memorization were assigned. Some testing was done orally. Pastor Kirst taught the class. Mrs. Kreger' father "did quite a bit" to help her with her lessons in the evenings.

Pastor Kirst also confirmed one adult who was 26 years old. In 1914 a school was built. Confirmation class met in this one room school building until 1948. The seventy-fifth anniversary booklets states, "Christian Day School was never held in the schoolhouse as Pastor Kirst had hoped; but the building did serve the congregation well for catechetical and summer instruction, for meetings and for fellowship purposes. At this time, one Sunday a month was designated for worship to be conducted in the American language; heretofore, services had been held in German." Catechism instructions at this time were still held in the German language. Children's Christmas Eve Services are already going on at this time.

The seventy-fifth anniversary booklet states that "On May 11, 1915, Pastor Kirst was released by the congregation to accept a Call to St. Stephan's Church, Beaver Dam." On June fifth of that

year confirmation was held. Pastor Kirst recorded this confirmation. Sixteen young people were confirmed.

At this point it is interesting to note the consistency in the age of confirmands which was established. Pastor Brockman's confirmands were all 13 years old except for three individuals. Pastor Gladosch confirmed a majority of thirteen year olds.

At this point the consistency is broken for a time. Following a vacancy, Pastor Pankow's first class had seven years difference between the oldest and youngest members of the class. Following the vacancy class, Pastor Pankow confirmed children at a slightly older age. At that time only fourteen to sixteen year olds were confirmed. Pastor Kirst had a broader range of ages in each class. They were consistently twelve to sixteen years old. Because there was a four year range in ages and two years between classes, the youngest member of the 1911 class was older than the oldest member of the 1915 class. It would be interesting to find out why there is so much overlap during the Kirst years.

### III. The Pieper Pastorate - 1915-1922

Pastor Gerhard Pieper arrived in 1915. Ten young people were confirmed by Pastor Pieper on April 22, 1917. The ages of those confirmed on that day were not recorded. The outbreak of World War I did not rule out expansion at St. John's. In 1918 the church was expanded and refurnished.

In January 1919 it was resolved to teach Sunday School in the English language. Vern Manthey who was confirmed in July 1919 recalls being a member of the last class confirmed in the German language. Sixteen were confirmed by Pastor Pieper on July 20 of



that year. They ranged widely in age from eleven to seventeen. they were confirmed one year before the congregation's twenty-fifth anniversary.

Mildred (Warnke) Peterson (Class Of '21) remembers that her class was confirmed in English. They began being taught in German but ended up with English alone. By this time the children could no longer speak or understand German well enough. Classes were held in a "small school building on church property." They were held every Saturday for one year. Pastor Pieper would come from Cambria on the train and take the 3:30 PM train back. Class hours were 9:00 AM - 12:00 N and 1:00PM - 3:00PM. Summer school was only held in the year of confirmation.

The course included Catechism study and quite a bit of Bible history. Methods included lecture, question and answer, oral testing and a test given about once a month. Homework and memorization of passages were also assigned. About eight to ten passages were assigned each week. All of the chief parts of the Catechism were memorized as well. Formal questioning before the congregation covered most of the Catechism.

Mrs. Peterson further comments that the one year course was difficult. Discipline was strict. The children recognized their goal and worked at their assignments. They had to work at it with their nose to the grindstone. However, this instruction did lay a solid foundation for many strong Christian lives. She mentions a couple of times that those who had to work the hardest in the class have turned out to be the most faithful and active of members.

Confirmation was held on August 7, 1921. Fifteen were confirmed on that day. They ranged in age from thirteen to sixteen, plus one nineteen year old. This was Pastor Pieper's final confirmation class at St. John's. Pastor Pieper pursued a call to Baraboo in July of 1922.

#### IV. The Schroeder Pastorate - 1922-1929

Pardeeville and Cambria decided to call separate pastors at this time. The fifth man called to serve St. John's was Martin Schroeder. He became the first resident Pastor of St. John's. During the seven years that Pastor Schroeder was at St. John's instructions increased in frequency. Classes at the same time decreased to more manageable numbers of students.

Pastor Schroeder confirmed four classes of children and four classes of young adults ages sixteen to twenty-four. There were two confirmations each year from 1924-1926.

I will not make extended mention of adult confirmations from this point on in this paper. I will note here that adult confirmations have been a regular part of St. John's history from 1924 right up to the present time in keeping with Savior's Great Commission. The advent of resident Pastor appears to have greatly aided this effort.

Approximately one year after the arrival of Pastor Schroeder confirmation was held. On September 2, 1923 a class of thirteen students was confirmed. This is the second latest confirmation date in St. John's history and probably is related to the vacancy in 1922.

All of the rest of the Schroeder classes were confirmed

during the summer. The next children's confirmation class was not confirmed until July 12, 1925. The young members of the class were twelve to thirteen years old plus a seventeen year old. There were seven children in this class. A little over a year later a group of five were confirmed who were born about the same time as the class of 1925. By this time they were fourteen to fifteen years old. This group was confirmed on August 1, 1926. One year later on July 31, 1927 six young people were confirmed. They were ages thirteen to sixteen. This was Pastor Schroeder's last confirmation class at St. John's.

With the coming of a resident Pastor it had now become possible to break up the class into smaller class sessions over a longer period of time. At this time Saturday classes began. Russell Warnke was a member of the 1927 class. He recalls that the class met each Saturday morning from 9:00 in the morning until 12:00 noon. They met for the "full three hours." At this time the course was two years long.

Despite the time change the course remained the same. The amount of memory work was about the same as was assigned in the previous one year course. The memory work assigned each week was cut in half so that it could be spread out over the two years. Two books were used, the English Bible and the English Catechism. Discipline was strict and completion of the work was required. One of the strong points of the class was memorization of Bible passages and retention of the Word of God. In 1929, Pastor Schroeder left for Bay City, Michigan.

#### V. The Engel Pastorate - 1929-1948

Pastor Alphonse J. Engel arrived from Ixonia, Wisconsin. Pastor Engle's nineteen years at St. John's is the longest stay of any pastor to the present day. During his pastorate the use of German was completely phased out at St. John's by 1946. The congregation was growing and expanding. Confirmation dates became more regular and consistent. By the end of the Engel era the children would be consistently of the same age as those confirmed in the Beidenweg classes at the turn of the century. This consistency has been maintained up to the present day.

After almost three years without a confirmation, Ten young people were confirmed on April 13, 1930 by Pastor Engel. This was the first class after the vacancy and the members of the class ranged in age from twelve to sixteen years.

The next confirmation date was just less than a year later, on April 5, 1931. On that day seven young people ages twelve to seventeen were confirmed along with five adults. One year later on April 9, 1933, eleven more youths were confirmed. They ranged in age from twelve to sixteen.

Confirmation was held every year for the rest of the decade of the thirties. The 1934 class was smaller in number and closer together in age than the previous class. On May 6, 1934 a class of six was confirmed. They ranged in age from twelve to fifteen years. The May 19, 1935 class had four members ages twelve to fourteen. The May 31, 1936 class had seven members ages twelve to sixteen. At this time seventeen was the age which was the youngest confirmed as an adult.

During these years 1933-1936 the confirmation date was

gradually moved. Pastor Engel' first classes were confirmed in the beginning of April, after previous Pastors had had confirmation in the summer months. The rest of Pastor Engel's confirmations would be at the end of May except for 1941 and 1943.

For the rest of the decade the classes were small. On May 30, 1937 a class of six, ages twelve to fourteen were confirmed. On May 22, 1938, one fourteen year old girl was confirmed. On May 28, 1939 seven were confirmed, ages thirteen to fifteen.

I received information from three confirmands of the late 1930s. Confirmation instructions were held in the school house located near the church and the parsonage. Transportation at this time included rides in automobiles, riding with a milkman, and walking. The course lasted for two school years. (September-May) The classes were still held on Saturday mornings from 9:00 until noon.

The basic material studied was the same as in other years. Likewise strict discipline and hard work were part of the program. Bible passages and the chief parts of the Catechism were to be memorized. One person noted that the formal Questioning lasted about two hours and was quite intense.

After 1939 temporary changes were made. Confirmation was again celebrated once every two years and in early April. This brought about much larger classes. A class of sixteen was confirmed on Palm Sunday, April 6, 1941. They ranged in age from thirteen to sixteen. Two years later a class of eighteen was confirmed on Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943. The class of '43 was one of the largest classes ever confirmed at St. John'. It had

eighteen members. By this time a new hymnal called The Lutheran Hymnal was being used at St. John's.

I received information from three confirmands of the 1940s. Classes in the 1940s were still being held in the school house on Saturday mornings. The hours were 9:00 - 11:30 AM. The morning schedule included a long session of Catechism work, followed by a break and ended with a shorter period of Bible history. The children had one book for Catechism and one book for Bible history. The Chief parts of the Catechism were required memory work. Homework included memorization of Bible passages and the reading of Bible history lessons. The number of passages varied with the material but averaged about nine or ten each week. The Bible history lessons were subject to oral questioning each week. Written tests were also given. One confirmand still has five such tests. Pastor Engel also made use of memory devices such as spelling bee types of games with the memory work. The formal questioning included material and key passages from the entire Catechism.

Pastor Engel is remembered as being a gifted teacher. Previous to his pastorate Sunday School had been taught by congregation lay members. At this time he taught the Seventh and eighth grades in Sunday School. Lay members continued to teach the lower grades in Sunday School. The practice of the Pastor teaching Sunday School continued for a number of years after the Engel era. (I do not know what happened to Bible Class during these years.)

The year 1945 marked the fiftieth anniversary of St. John's

congregation. In 1945 changes took place again. In 1945 the confirmation date was moved back to the end of May. Beginning in 1945 until the present, confirmation has been held in the Spring of each consecutive year..

The class of '45 was confirmed on Penecost Sunday, May 20, 1945. The twelve members of the class ranged in age from thirteen to fifteen years. On the last Sunday of May, May 26, 1946 the next class was confirmed. This date was the last Sunday before Ascension. Seven young people were confirmed on that day. They ranged in age from thirteen to fifteen years. The class of '47 was confirmed on Pentecost Sunday, May 25, 1947. This Sunday was the last Sunday of May. The majority of the eleven members of the class were thirteen years old on their confirmation day.

Pentecost Sunday one year later was the next confirmation day. Ten young people were confirmed on that day, May 16, 1948. They ranged in age from twelve to fourteen years. This was the last class confirmed by Pastor Engel. Pastor Engel left for Medford, Wisconsin at the end of November 1948. Pastor E. C. Schewe of Cambria covered the vacancy for three months.

#### **VI. The Mackdanz Years - 1949-1954**

Pastor A. H. Mackdanz was installed on the last Sunday of February in 1949. He served the congregation for five years until his death on February 26, 1954.

I had the opportunity to look at a Catechism used in 1949, the year of Pastor Mackdanz's arrival. This was the green 1947 edition of the Gausewitz Catechism published by Northwestern Publishing House. Many notes were hand-written into this

Catechism. Many of the notes are very similar to those which the editors of the most recently used Catechism have added. These notes included brief explanations, background information, definitions and underlining and numbering of of the key points in paragraphs.

The class continued to be taught on Saturday mornings with the seventh and eight grades meeting together. At this time class were taught in the church basement and no longer in the school building. As before Catechism and Bible history were taught and the Pastor taught the upper grades in Sunday School. The chief parts of the Catechism as always were required memory work. (5) or 6 memory passages were assigned per lesson. The formal questioning involved the answering of questions and various recitations.

During the years 1949 through 1951 adults and children were confirmed jointly. The adults' class and the children's class were held separately. Less than five months after he arrived, Pastor Mackdanz confirmed thirteen young people along with twelve adults on Trinity Sunday, June 12, 1949. This is the only confirmation date in the month of June from 1930 until the present day. The late date can be attributed to the Pastor's arrival late in the school year.

It may also be noted here that the Sunday School attendance records from March through June 1949 are still around. The record shows that already in the 1940s a large minority of children was attending Sunday School infrequently.

In 1950 confirmation returned to Palm Sunday after being held



at the end of May for a number of years. On April 2, 1950, five thirteen year olds were confirmed along with six adults. On Palm Sunday, April 6, 1951, seven young people were confirmed along with five adults. Six of the children were age thirteen.

In 1952 the children were once again confirmed separately from the adults. However, one seventeen year old and one fifteen year old were confirmed with the thirteen and fourteen year olds. There were seven members of this class which was confirmed on Palm Sunday, April 6, 1952. One year later on Palm Sunday, March 29, 1953 Pastor Mackdanz confirmed his final children's class. There were ten children in this class who ranged in age from thirteen to fifteen.

The class of 1954 was first taught by Pastor Mackdanz. He passed away in February. Pastor E. C. Schewe was once again vacancy Pastor. He finished teaching the class and confirmed them. Confirmation was held on Palm Sunday, April 11, 1954. There were twelve children in this class. They were all thirteen or fourteen years of age. This confirmation was recorded by Pastor E. A. Breiling who briefly served as vacancy Pastor from July 1, 1954 until August 1954.

#### VII. The Lemke Pastorate - 1954-1959

Pastor Oscar A. Lemke came to Pardeeville from rural Edgar Wisconsin in August of 1954. It appears that confirmation instructions and Sunday School had been shortened either due to Pastor Mackdanz's health or the vacancy or due to some other reason. Instructions were once again intensified. Pastor Lemke writes, "Sunday School and Confirmation Class were held for

fifteen minutes previous to 1954, but were expanded very soon to a full hour during our stay at Pardeeville."

Sessions were held for one hour on Wednesdays in the Church fellowship room. Sessions were also held with the Pastor in the church balcony on Sunday mornings. Two students of Pastor Lemke from the classes of '57 and '60 remember that the Wednesday session lasted from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. They also remember being taught on Saturdays from 9:00 to 11:00 AM. The students remember meeting in the Church basement. The attendance records for 1955 show that classes met on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday for a large part of the year. They even met every Sunday during July and August.

Pastor Lemke put extra emphasis on Bible history. Records still exist of New Testament and Old Testament Bible history lessons which were handed in each week. It appears that the entire story was written out to be handed in each time. The children were expected to be able to tell each story as well. Between September 1955 and March 1956 sixty-four lessons were covered. Memory work was also recorded. It was also recorded if work was handed in late and if help was required to complete recitations.

It is striking how many of the children were very faithful in attendance and completion of assignments. Completion of all assignments by all confirmands did not occur. It appears that some leniency was granted to those who completed the vast majority of the assignments.

On the other hand there are a few class members in the record

book which did not complete any more than one-fourth of the assignments. Their names do not appear on the list of those who were confirmed. These children must have voluntarily dropped out of the course before disciplinary action was required.

Vacation Bible School was started at this time as well. Vacation Bible School from 1956-1959 lasted for three weeks in the month of June. VBS met six days each week. Pastor Lemke wrote that "confirmation instruction was involved in both" Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

The Catechism course lasted two years. The Wisconsin Synod Catechism was used at this time. The well-known tan edition came out in 1956 during Pastor Lemke's stay at Pardeeville. Besides the study of the Catechism and Bible history previously noted, Pastor Lemke mentions a couple of specific things studied. These things include some American church history and unscriptural organizations such as Scouts and lodges. Memorization included the chief parts and Bible passages. Record book often shows that each section, such as Lord's Supper or Baptism or The Lord's Prayer were recited by the eighth graders as one unit. The younger students were allowed to break up Baptism into the four parts for recitation. Pastor Lemke also notes that the books of the Bible and some hymns were memorized as well. Homework and methods varied with the material and the situations at hand. Discipline was "very strict" and kept "with the cooperation of the parents." "On rare occasions" a student was denied confirmation.

All of the confirmations during the Lemke era took place on

Palm Sunday. The vast majority of those confirmed were ages thirteen and fourteen with some as old as sixteen. According to the gradebook it appears that the older students had stayed in the class for an extra year in order to complete the work. In the five years from 1955 to 1959, forty-eight children were confirmed. The average class had just under ten students in it.

Pastor Lemke left to pursue a call at Waukegan, Illinois on December 27, 1959. The vacancy was covered by Pastor Marlyn Schroeder from January 1, 1960 until April 24, 1960. Two weeks before the new pastor was installed, confirmation was held. On Palm Sunday, April 10, 1961 a class of sixteen youths were confirmed. They were all thirteen to fourteen years of age except for one fifteen year old.

#### VIII. The Zehms Pastorate - 1960-1963

On April 24, 1961, The Sunday after Easter, Pastor Elmer J. Zehms was installed at St. John's. A couple of practical changes are noteworthy during Pastor Zehms' stay in Pardeeville.

The date for confirmation was changed from Palm Sunday to a date late in May. This transission is noted in the church council minutes of January 6, 1961, "The council unanimously approved confirmation date set for Pentecost Sunday." For the next ten years after this confirmation was held on the last Sunday in May, Memorial Day weekend.

Pastor Zehms continued to hold confirmation class on Saturday mornings. The classes lasted for three hours beginning at 8:45 in the morning. A change took place concerning the duration of the course. The children at this time spent three years in

instructions.

Pastor Zehms taught the course using the relatively new 1956 edition of the Catechism. The Bible and notebooks were also used for classwork. Several passages were to be memorized from each section of the Catechism. Pastor Zehms wrote to me, "They had to be able to recite all of the Catechism for confirmation." Memory work and also church attendance were prerequisites for confirmation.

Pastor Zehms mentioned that the children worked hard and that discipline was not a problem. However, Pastor Zehms felt that he "probably didn't given enough written tests."

Formal questioning was held before the congregation. It involved a portion of the Sunday service. While all of the Catechism was required knowledge for confirmation, only one or two sections were taken up during the formal Questioning in church.

Three classes were confirmed during Pastor Zehms tenure. The children were ages thirteen and fourteen plus two fifteen year olds. A class of sixteen was confirmed on May 21, 1961. A class of thirteen was confirmed on May 26, 1962. A class of twelve was confirmed on May 26, 1963.

After Christmas services in 1963, Pastor Zehms pursued another call. Pastor W. E. Schulz of Cambria covered the vacancy which lasted for a little over one month.

#### IX. The Koepsell Pastorate - 1964-1971

Pastor Markus O. Koepsell was installed as the sixth resident Pastor of St. John's on February 2, 1964. During Pastor

Koepsell's tenure the congregation recognized a need for a larger church and began to take steps toward building a new facility. In the mean time confirmation instructions were held in the Sunday School room in the church basement.

As in previous years, classes were held on Saturday mornings. The course returned to the two year method with Seventh and Eighth Grades meeting together much of the time. Classes began after Labor Day and continued until about the third week of May.

The 1956 edition of the Catechism served as the textbook. This was supplemented by a 48 page illustrated booklet on Luther's life entitled Living With Luther, by J. M. Weidenschilling. According to Pastor Koepsell, "Units I And II (of) Hagedorn's Worksheets" were utilized for homework. "One series of which dealt almost exclusively with catechism and the other dealt more with Bible history."

Pastor Koepsell writes that "emphasis was on doctrine and how sects differed from it. Our effort was to make pupils think instead of learning by rote." Students were also "drilled in dividing Law and Gospel in Bible passages." Pastor Koepsell also set aside "time for parents to come to church for consultation with pastor regarding their confirmand or catechumen."

While Vacation Bible School did not play much of a role in relation to Confirmation, the Sunday School did. Bible History lessons covered in Sunday School were briefly reviewed as reference was made to them in the catechism. The Bible History lessons were also used in application of the doctrines taught in the Catechism. Sunday School teachers would listen to memory

work which the Pastor assigned to the class.

While written tests were not used, each lesson was thoroughly reviewed orally at the beginning of the succeeding class. This was done with the books closed. Memory work included the chief parts and memory passages. The table of duties was considered optional. Pastor Koepsell mentions, "Bible passages were assigned but seldom learned."

Pastor Koepsell served St. John's during the Vietnam Era. The break down of authority and discipline in the nation at large also effected confirmation instructions at St. John's. For the first time it was noted that discipline was carried out "with great difficulty." He mentions, "I walked out of class a couple of times." He also mentions lack of time to see that assignments were completed and "failure to eliminate the distraction of their eating and chewing in class."

The main requirement for confirmation was that aptitude to examine one's self before communion. If Pastor Koepsell was convinced of this aptitude a child could be confirmed. No one was denied confirmation during this time.

The formal questioning involved a general overview of the Catechism. During a portion of the Sunday Service the class would respond to "around 50 questions."

Seven classes were confirmed during these seven years. The children were generally ages thirteen and fourteen with a handful of fifteen year olds. All were confirmed on the last Sunday of May. One hundred students were confirmed by Pastor Koepsell. The classes were as large as eighteen in 1969 and as small as eight

in 1965. The average class had twelve and one half students in it.

Pastor Koepsell left to pursue another call in April of the following year, 1961. During the vacancy, the twelve members of the next class were confirmed on May 30, 1971.

#### X. The Uhlhorn Pastorate - 1971-1985

Pastor Ronald Uhlhorn arrived from Pennsylvania in August of the same year, 1971. His fourteen years at St. John's are the second longest in the history of the congregation.

During those fourteen years many aspects of confirmation instructions did not change. The age of the vast majority of the confirmands remained in the thirteen to fourteen year old range. The textbook continued to be the 1957 edition of the catechism. The Bible was used regularly in the classroom. Classes were still held on Saturday mornings.

Other things changed. Halfway through the Uhlhorn years a new church was built. Therewith classes were moved from the old church's basement to rooms nine and ten of the education wing of the new church building.

Pastor Uhlhorn writes about the changes in the confirmation date which were effected soon after he arrived:

"The first year I served there, Confirmation was in May. This came very close to high school graduation. After discussion with the parents and others, we moved this to Palm Sunday. Confirmation was always held on Palm Sunday, with Examiniation on the Sunday before. Because Palm Sunday can come very early, the understanding was that the 7th graders would continue to attend class after Palm Sunday, to go over the Lord's Prayer and a course on the life of Luther."

Pastor Uhlhorn made a practice of visiting the parents of the



7th and 8th graders in their homes during the month of August. He mentions that this took "an extra effort" on his part. He felt that these visits proved to be worthwhile in improving attendance and giving encouragement.

The 7th and 8th graders met together for most of the year. Following the confirmation of the 8th grade, the 7th grade met to study the Lord's Prayer and the life of Luther. If necessary they would also begin to review the catechism as scheduling required.

Pastor Uhlhorn taught both grades together. When the class got to be as large as thirty students, he enlisted the help of a mother to listen to memory work. Sometimes the memory work would be handled with a fill in the blanks written quiz.

The children were expected to bring to class a pencil, a Bible, the Catechism, and an 8½ X 11 notebook. They were taught using lecture, question and answer, as well as reviewing. Periodically tests were given. The children also were to memorize the chief parts of the Catechism. Approximately two to three Bible passages were to be memorized each week. By confirmation the students had learned approximately 65 passages in all.

Some Bible History was taught in confirmation class. This included some Bible History worksheets. Most Bible stories were taught in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. The Books of the Bible were memorized in Vacation Bible School.

Classes met for two and one half hours each week. A fifteen minute recess broke up the class. The children were placed in

a seating arrangement and no talking was allowed in class. although regular attendance was a requirement for confirmation, no children were denied confirmation. A "written excuse" from the parents was required for absences.

Examination was held on the fifth Sunday in Lent each year. The questioning replaced the sermon in the late service. The questions covered the entire Catechism. One student recalls sitting in the front pews of the church and being asked question in the order in which they were seated.

In analyzing Catechism classes, Pastor Uhlhorn makes a comparison to a Christian Day School. Confirmands at St. John's who attended Northwestern Prep "felt their instructions were on a level with children who attended a Christian Day School, but they did not have the Bible history background, nor the memorization of hymns as those children did. That, I believe was the weak point and always is when instructing public school children."

Pastor Uhlhorn also mentions one special case in Catechism instructions. "In 1982 I confirmed a hearing impaired girl, ... I instructed her privately (one on one) for 3 years, using a combination of my notes and some of the Simplified Catechism. She was confirmed with the class of 1982." There is an essay on file at the Seminary Library on this topic co-authored by Pastor Uhlhorn and Professor Paul Eickmann.

Some changes which took place later on were anticipated in this era. Pastor Uhlhorn writes that "many requests were coming for classes on a weekday or weeknight." During deer hunting season, classes were actually moved from Saturday to Friday to

accommodate the hunters. After Pastor Uhlhorn left classes were changed from Saturdays to Wednesdays. The new 1985 edition of the Catechism was being phased in with the younger Sunday School children. This edition was used for instructions shortly after Pastor Uhlhorn left.

Fourteen classes of youths were confirmed at St. John's by Pastor Uhlhorn. Two hundred and three youths were confirmed during those years. The average class had fourteen and one half students in it. The classes ranged in size from eight students in 1979 to the all-time largest class in 1981 with twenty-one students.

In June of 1985 Pastor Uhlhorn received a call to St. Paul's in New Ulm, Minnesota. Pastor Harold Sturm of rural Arlington (Leeds) served the vacancy for nearly a full year. During the vacancy classes were switched from Saturday mornings to Wednesdays after school. On May 4, 1986, eleven students were confirmed by Pastor Sturm.

#### XI. The Headrick Pastorate - 1986-1991

On June 1, 1986 Pastor Victor L. Headrick, formerly of rural Marshfield, was installed as Pastor of St. John's. He is currently serving there at the writing of this paper.

The move of Confirmation Day from Palm Sunday to May was accomplished during the last vacancy. During the Headrick years confirmation has regularly been held on the third Sunday of May. This move allows it to be held late in the school year without conflicting with the high school's graduation.

The Wednesday afternoon sessions continued after the vacancy.

The 7th and 8th grades were still taught simultaneously by the Pastor. The only initial change was the influx of the 1985 edition of the Catechism

Pastor Headrick picked up the class of 1987 after they had completed one year of instructions using the tan Gausewitz Catechism. He began to teach using a combination of the Gausewitz and Kuske Catechisms in the 1986-87 school year. Three students were confirmed on May 17, 1987.

Eight eighth graders were confirmed on May 15, 1988 and ten were confirmed on May 21, 1989. These two classes were taught by Pastor Headrick in the Wednesday afternoon sessions. These classes were taught using the Blue Kuske Catechism.

In 1989 a change took place. The 7th and 8th grades were split up into two separate classes taught simultaneously by different instructors. Mrs. Joel (Jane) Kohlwey, a qualified laywoman, taught the seventh grade class. Pastor Headrick taught the eighth grade class.

In May 1989, the congregation found out that their application for a vicar had been filled. This made it possible to expand Catechism instructions. Confirmation instructions now begin with the 6th grade class. This class is taught by the vicar. The 7th grade class continues to be taught by Mrs. Kohlwey. These classes use the Kuske Catechism and the Julian Anderson Workbooks. The 8th grade class is taught by Pastor Headrick using "New Life in Christ" by Valleskey and Bivens.

A class of ten was confirmed on May 20, 1990. Sixteen will be confirmed on May 19, 1991. In the spring of 1992 the first of

the three year classes will be confirmed.

Homework includes workbook exercises, memory passages and the chief parts of the Catechism. Normally three passages are assigned each week. The total number of passages learned is 108. The Table of Duties is included as required memory work.

Questioning is held on the Sunday before confirmation. It takes the place of the Sermon on that day. One section of the Catechism is covered using around 280 questions.

Motivational, disciplinary and attendance problems are being addressed in increasing measure. Initially informative letters were sent to the parents with little or no results. In the last two years, members of the church council and the elders have begun to take turns supervising discipline on Wednesday afternoons. Parents have been involved in meetings and taking responsibility for their child's Christian education. It is hoped that parental involvement can be increased even more in the future. Eighth Graders meet individually with the Pastor to express their sincere desire to be confirmed and to understand the serious nature of confirmation.

Steps have been taken to step up Christian education on the Sunday School level. The Sunday School now sings in church services once each month. Seventh and eighth graders now work through an overview course of the sixty-six books of the Bible and Bible history in Sunday School as a supplement to Catechism work. Vacation Bible School is encouraged as a necessary aspect of Christian education. Regular attendance at Sunday School is a practical prerequisite to Confirmation instructions. Basic

familiarization with Bible history and the chief parts of the Catechism are necessary to comprehension of Catechism instructions.

May the Lord of the church enable His people to bring up His children in His Word!