

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

(LCA) MEQUON, WISCONSIN

by

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Church History
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I. Introduction

I have decided to write my senior church history paper on Christ Lutheran Church (LCA). I chose this church because I was always interested in what the LCA taught. I also wanted to squelch rumors and find out for myself what actually was taught in other Lutheran churches. Christ Lutheran Church is located at 10606 N. Port Washington Road. It is one mile south of Mequon and Port Roads, on the east side of Port Washington Road. Christ is just one of two LCA churches in Mequon-the other being "House of Prayer" on 76th street. (Christ is a younger congregation than House of Prayer.

II. Background of the LCA

Here is some information about the LCA which Pastor Ellsworth Freyer gave me. (He is the current pastor serving at Christ). The headquarters of the LCA is located in New York City. Baptized membership for the LCA stands at 2,898,202. They have 5,817 congregations served by 8,484 pastors. Their total annual budget is \$63,670,000. The LCA has 30 regional units called synods, each headed by a bishop. "Missionaries of the LCA are at work in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, England, Finland, West Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Netherlands, Peru, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Uruguay, Egypt, and Jerusalem."¹

However, on January 1, 1988, the LCA will merger with the ALC, Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, to form the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Pastor Freyer thinks they will lose members because of the merger, the main reason being not all people are in favor of it.

III. 20 Year History of Christ Lutheran Church

1965

September 9 The first worship services were held at Mequon Women's Club. Unitarian services are now held there. Christ was charged a fee for these services.

1966

Feb. 9-Charter members meet and adopt new name, "Christ Church."

April 13-Eleven acres of property purchased at 10606 N. Port Washington Road. This location is their current site of their church.

May 15-The reverend Karl Danielson installed as first Pastor.

In an interview with Freyer, he told me Danielson was a mission developer and he served there for two years.

September 8-Worship services transferred to Notre Dame on the Lake Mequon, Wisconsin. Christ could have worship services for free here without paying any type of rental fee. When Notre Dame was still in Mequon, Christ Church and its members were closely associated with them.

September 15-The first building program is initiated. Pastor Danielson was a very artistic man and helped design the church. The architecture is a Japanese type. Truly the Lord blessed Christ church in 1966, a very pivotal year in their history.

1967

-3-

August 12-The Rev. Raymond Tiemeyer installed as Pastor. He was at Christ only one year. He had no intention of staying there. Only one new family was added when Tiemeyer was there.

August 26-Parsonage purchased at 445 E. Cedar Lane, Mequon. Since this time Pastor Freyer and his wife have purchased this house for their own.

October 17-City of Mequon approves their building plans.

December 3-Groundbreaking for church building at 10606 N. Port Washington Road. This was the original part of the building, it was added onto later. An educational wing, meeting rooms, and office space were added on later.

1968

February-Construction on the church begins.

July 28-First worship services in new church after motorcade from Notre Dame of the Lake. Many nuns from there attended these worship services. This motorcade extended from Notre Dame on Highland Rd. to Christ Church.

September 10-Dedication of first worship center.

1969

July 20-Christ church extends call to Rev. Ellsworth Freyer. Pastor Freyer graduated from Carthage college in Kenosha. He furthered his studies at Northwestern Seminary in Minneapolis. His first call was to Green Bay where he served for seven years. He then received a call to Racine. This church had over 3,000 members. On this date then he accepted the call to Mequon. On Sept. 21 he was installed as pastor of Christ Lutheran Church.

November-Congregation experiences successful Stewardship program of

1969 cont.

19.6% increase in giving. They then pledge \$1,600.00 to Carthage College funding campaign to build the chapel-fine arts building the pledge was paid in full. They very actively support Carthage College.

1970

March-Christ Church invites Gert Behanna to Mequon to preach at Christ Church. (This was the first time a woman preached here). Six hundred people fill the church to hear her message. Gert Behanna is a recovered alcoholic from New York. She was married and divorced three times. She was a wealthy woman but was told by doctors that she soon would die. She preached on her spiritual awakening-she did not die at this time. Freyer had met her at Luther League so he asked her to preach in Mequon. The theme of her message was this: GOD'S LOVE IN CONVERSION. Behanna became Freyer's spiritual mother. On the day she preached at Christ t.v. monitors were set up so everyone could see her and hear her. She also donated some money.

1971

January-Pastor Freyer challenges Christ Church to become the servant church in Mequon.

February-First father-son banquet is held.

March-Small group movement starts at Christ Church.

1973

September 9-40 couples meet for fellowship/

December-Uganda family is sponsored by Christ Church. This is a first of numerous activities in which the congregation becomes involved.

1974

February-Pastor Freyer named project director of pre-teen juvenile delinquency program. Christ Church sponsors the program.

March-Freyer becomes chaplain for Mequon Auxiliary Police.

Later he is appointed Chaplain of Mequon Police Department by the late chief Thomas Buntrock. He still holds this position. Just recently my mom saw him conduct a service when the new police chief was sworn in.

November-Christ Church experiences best stewardship efforts ever.

1975

March-Several Christ Church members are instrumental in making the Mequon-Thiensville family service a self sustaining corporation.

1976

Planning committee meets with the Rev. Fred Marks, regional director of division of North American Missions, LCA.

May-Christ Church celebrates its 10th anniversary.

May 17-Freyer celebrates his 15th year of ordination.

1977

Unite program is undertaken to increase giving to Christ Church and the synod, and the LCA.

1978

March-Pastor Freyer becomes a member of board of trustees of Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

November-Christ Church with help of unite program pays off \$38,000 mortgage in one year.

50 families of Christ Church pledge \$32,966 for strength for mission special appeal of the LCA. Church council appoints building committee.

1979

March 22-Church council approves building committee recommendation to retain Blake-Huettenrauch as architects for building committee.

May 13-"The future is now" Capital funds program begins under the direction of Lutheran's laymen's movement.

1980

May 7-Bids are opened and accepted.

July 20-The Christ Church family breaks ground and the new building is started.

1981

May 17-Congregation surprises Pastor Freyer for his 20th year of ordination.

July 18-Construction of the new facility is completed.

1982

January-Christ church begins to open up its beautiful facility to the community. Adult day center program continues to grow and increases its hours. It is now open five days a week for the use of the community.

April-Christ Church receives \$20,000 from strength for mission, of which congregation gave \$32,966 which was paid in full in 1978.

November-Christ Church experiences growth in stewardship using the Pony Express program.

1983

March-Women reaching program meets each Thursday evening at Christ Church.

April-Sail program (high school drug abuse program) uses church facility several times a year.

1983 cont.

-7-

May-Board of directors of advocates helping battered women and families of Ozaukee County begin using Christ Church for its 7:30 meeting each month.

Pastor Freyer recognized for his 11 years of service as Mequon Police Department Chaplain.

November-Christ Church experiences another increase in giving for stewardship.

1984

January-Congregation accepts challenge goal of \$8,928 for the Lutheran social services "partners in Caring" capital funds campaign.

November-Christ once again goes the second mile in Christian stewardship.

1985

May-Coni Lampien is installed as the Christ Church Christian education and youth coordinator.

November-Pastor Freyer and his wife Kay purchase the parsonage at 445 E Cedar Lane, Mequon.

December-Christ Church does not succeed in pledging income to meet the 1986 proposed budget. Budget cuts made to match pledged income.

1986

January-Senior citizen hot meal program begins. Meals provided at noon.

IV. LAY INVOLVEMENT

Christ stresses education for their members. Weekly they have lay members read from the scriptures. Lay people also serve as liturgists. The choir sings often. On special occasions a cherub

choir, liturgical dancers, and instrumentalists add beauty to their service. "In addition, some services, such as Youth Sunday and Music Sunday, have almost total lay involvement."²

Adults are involved in Bible study, some lay people do teach their Bible classes. For the younger children there is a cherub choir for anyone from the 2nd-6th grade. During the summer Pastor Freyer will take his 14 and 15 year olds to a confirmation camp at Carthage in Kenosha. He calls it a "religious experience." They take this trip as close to Reformation day as possible.

At Christ everything evolves around the family. He preaches a sermon for the adults and also has a children's sermonette. For the children's sermon, he will do it from the front of the church using a visual aid of some sort. He doesn't really prepare for this sermon, but does it off the cuff.

Evangelism groups include trained lay members who go from door to door. Their evangelism committee begins in the church, they welcome newcomers at all their services. Freyer told me evangelism is done on a more personal basis. They seek out the people who have just moved into the area. "The evangelism brochures which they hand out are produced by the lay people. They distribute them to the motels on Port Washington Road, visitors, the entire congregation, and families in Mequon and Thiensville who have had new babies."³ A woman heads their evangelism committee.

A woman also heads the youth ministry. In May they held a youth workday at the church. The youth group is included in the budget

and considered a very important part of their future.

Christ does not have a Christian Day School. Pastor Freyer informed me that for the most part LCA does not have schools. They believe strongly in the public school system. Strong efforts have been the addition of their educational wings. The educational wing was added on in 1981. They have initiated a cradle roll, a Sunday school, teacher workshops, VBS, Youth work, confirmation, adult education, and Advent programs.

At Christ there have been some very special lay members. Billy Grahahm's oldest daughter Gigi was a member there. Her married name is Tchividjian. They lived on Mequon Rd. by the lake. Their son Stephan was confirmed at Calvary in 1978. Billy Graham was in our church on that day and I met him. However Billy Graham did not ever attend Christ for fear that he would attract too much attention. Mr. Tchividjian taught a Bible class at Christ church and also served on their church council. He told my mother they did not know the way of salvation there-a sad statement coming from their teacher. The Tchividjian's came to Mequon so that he could get his degree at Marquette. Pastor Freyer knew Billy Graham and was invited by him to attend a crusade at the Pontiac Silverdome in Detroit.

The stewardship at Christ is very good. Pastor Freyer told me that the average gift is \$30.00 per week per family. Over 90 families give that much to the church. Their annual budget is \$200,000 per year. The people practice tithing.

Lay involvement also shows in the attendance at the 1985

annual congregational meeting. Out of 343 members, 71 adults were present. Looking at the number of people present-the number of women equaled the number of men. Many have and do serve on their church council.

Here are the number of members during the 1980's:

1981-399

1982-378

1983-352

1984-345

1985-343

Even though Christ is not that large of a congregation, the total lay involvement is incredible. It is a church we can use as an example for lay involvement. Take for instance their Sunday School-in 1974 they had 74 students. They had 20 teachers. Also their Vacation Bible they had 59 pupils with 30 adults and teenagers helping out. "Yes, our house of worship is not only a hospital for sinners, where we can come and kneel at the Lord's Table, but it is also a sanctuary for saints who can come and be fed and know that they are welcomed, needed, and loved in the name of the compassionate Christ."⁴ The members do feel welcome there and that is why they get involved. As I interviewed and talked with Pastor Freyer and some of their members I felt that welcomeness. I can see why they do get involved.

V. TEACHINGS AT CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

I learned what their teachings were by interviewing Pastor Freyer. He was very cooperative. He gave me a few of his sermons

to read. On them I found a theme but no text. The themes of the sermons seemed to me to be very general. I also did not find any mention of the word gospel. One sermon had a decision theology slant. He gave me an issue of their monthly newsletter-"The Christ Church Story Teller." A lot of time and effort goes into this publication.

Pastor Freyer told me enjoys preaching and puts 20-30 hours of work per week into his sermon preparation. I asked him if the gospel was preached at Christ. He responded, "yes." Each Sunday he uses a children's sermonette. He illustrates it with a visual aid. He does not preach this sermon from the pulpit. He teaches and believes that the Bible is 100% true. When the adults receive communion, he blesses the little children too young for communion. (Their children receive communion in the 5th grade.)

During the 1987 Lenten season he is preaching on Psalm 51. In his leading of the worship and liturgy, he told me the object is to worship Christ not him. However, as he puts it, it's kind of a show. He doesn't do stuff "by the book". Upon greeting the parishioners at the close of the service, he hugs his members as a sign of fellowship. "Without your Hugs each Sunday morning, I could not make it through the week. Keep coming to church and remember, "You can't give a hug-without getting one in return."⁵ He even hugged me when I left the church.

Pastor Freyer belongs to service clubs in the nearby area. Last Thanksgiving he participated in an ecumenical service at the Jewish synagogue. (The one on Mequon Road.) A Unitarian minister said the prayer, he joined in. He told me he had no problem with

people of so many religions worshipping together. He said he would like to see it more often.

"Women are doctors and farmers, why can't they be ministers?" His response to the question, Do you allow women to be pastors? As far as pulpit fellowship is concerned he is very free on the matter. A girl from Concordia College here in Mequon preached at Christ not long ago. A priest preached there, and even a nun. I asked him if he would let me preach there-"Yes," he said.

Masons are members at Christ Church. Many of their members are recovered alcoholics. Now instead of drinking they devote their time to the Lord. Pastor Freyer works with alcoholics and started the Alcoholics program in Mequon. He believes strongly in community serving and is very social minded.

He works very hard for his annual salary of \$27,240.00. He serves in the following areas:

- elected President of the Board of Directors of Advocates for Helping Battered Women and their families in Ozaukee County
- serves on Board of Directors of Family sharing in Ozaukee County
- member of Ozaukee County jail study committee
- his wife Kay serves as a health nurse at Lakeshore Middle School
- just finished 10 year term on the Board of Trustees for Carthage College
- member of the Board of Directors of the Matt Tolbert House in Mil.
- member of the International Conference of Police Chaplains and received the "1985" John A. Price award for excellency in Chaplancy.

In 1985 he attended 175 meetings, held 107 counseling sessions totaling 239 hours. He made 49 prospective calls and 107 home

visits who were sick. His ministry also included visiting the sick. These are just the special duties, let's not forget the daily routine and sermon preparation.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is the lives he has touched, (Pastor Freyer), not the brick and mortar, which best stand as milestones in Freyer's work in the community. His church office-walls covered with photographs, plaques, and other memorabilia- is filled with success stories and works in progress. Freyer wants his church to be a headlight in the community and not a taillight. This best sums up his overall work in the community. I hope and pray that work centers around Christ.

Last year I read some statistics that many LCA pastors did not believe the Bible was 100 percent true. I was glad Freyer said it was. Overall the LCA is more liberal than the WELS but from this paper I can see we can take examples from them. It has answered some of the questions I had in my mind. I hope and pray that Christ Church does not forget HIS name, that it is the name of their church. May Christ never be taken out of their church! church!

ENDNOTES

¹Elca Pamphlet regarding the merger

²Caring and Sharing, Christ Lutheran Church p.2

³God's people-called to Share Evangelism section.

⁴God's people-called to share, Lay involvement section.

⁵Christ Lutheran Church Dedication-Introductory by Pastor Freyer

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Also 20 year history compiled from the congregational yearbook from those years.

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