

A HISTORY OF IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

BLACK CREEK, WISCONSIN

for

Prof. E. Fredrich - Church History

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65<sup>W</sup>  
Medford, Wisconsin

by  
Timm Meyer  
5/5/1980

A History of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Congregation  
Black Creek, Wisconsin

During the summer of 1901 Rev. G. Schoewe, of the Town of Center, came to Black Creek and gathered together a few Lutheran people and preached to them in small groups. This was a distance of approximately 10 miles. After a few months these people were ready to organize their own congregation. A constitution was drawn up by Pastor Schoewe, and on August 5, 1901, this was signed by the following charter members: Albert Rau, August Rahn, Herman Rahn, Julius Hofemeister, Martin Winter, William Missling, William Genske, Edward Missling, and Julius Barthel. In their first business meeting William Missling was elected president; Albert Rau, secretary; and William Genske, treasurer. The congregation was at once incorporated under the name of the Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church, under the laws granted to corporations by chapter 85, statutes of Wisconsin. The incorporation papers were recorded at the Register of Deeds office at Appleton, Wisconsin, on September 17, 1901.

Since Rev. Schoewe was already serving the St. Paul's Lutheran congregation at Binghamton and the St. Peter's congregation about four miles southeast of Black Creek, he could not adequately serve the newly organized Immanuel congregation. The members therefore asked Rev. Haese, of Freedom, to serve them in addition to his own charge. Freedom was located about 15 miles southeast of Black Creek. No matter, Rev. Haese began serving them the early part of October, holding services in the Good Templar's hall. (This building was part of the Gamble store on Main Street. Last summer the Gamble store moved into new quarters south of Black Creek. At that time it was located across the street from the Methodist church.)

In order to provide quarters for their pastor when he was in Black Creek to serve them, the congregation rented the upper rooms of Fred

Woehlert's home for \$1.00 a month. Fred Woehlert and his family were then accepted as members of the church.

Now numbering eleven families this new group of Lutherans sought to acquire their own church home. In their November meeting it was decided to buy the old Catholic church property for \$1,000.00. This included the church building, a frame structure, the organs, altar, pews, barn, and lots numbers 9 and 10. Eleven members donated \$365.00, a goodly sum in those times when a dollar was worth a dollar. With this amount, a down payment was made toward the buying of the church property.

The history of the Immanuel congregation is closely bound together with the affairs of the St. Peter's congregation, southeast of Black Creek, and the St. Paul's congregation at Binghamton. These two congregations were too small to have their own pastor, so they were served by Rev. Schoewe, from the Town of Center (today located halfway between Black Creek and Appleton, Wisconsin).

On May 4, 1902, the members of these three congregations met in the St. Peter's church to form a new parish, for the purpose of calling a pastor to serve the three congregations. Desiring to have their own pastor made it necessary for this group to provide a parsonage. This was the first undertaking of <sup>the</sup> newly organized parish. On July 27th, the parsonage building committee was chosen and consisted of five men (one from St. Peter's church and two from the two other congregations). The parsonage was then erected on the property of the Immanuel congregation in Black Creek. When the building was completed, there was enough money on hand to cover all but \$400.00 of the cost. The Parish minutes state; "This money was gathered entirely by free will offerings made by all the members."

The parish called a Seminary graduate, Gerhard Hinmenthal, to be its first pastor. Rev. Hinmenthal accepted the call, and was ordained and

installed on March 15, 1903.

In order to have a common meeting place for the instructing of the children, it was necessary to have a school building. On May 29, 1904, the parish held a meeting to solve this problem. They decided to buy the old Methodist church for \$250.00. It is a thrill to read on page 12 of the parish record; "And so, trusting in God for the free will offerings entirely, we go forward with the building of our school." The moving, the foundation, and the remodeling of the school house were done at a cost of \$199.00 (The building was sold in 1951 for \$500.00). The free will offering of the members amounted to more than enough to pay for the school, and with \$150.00 left over, a furnace was installed in the parsonage.

During the first years of the existence of the parish, the Wisconsin Synod subsidized the pastor's salary. In the meeting of the parish, held May 7, 1905, the members voted to go self-supporting, and to sincerely thank the Wisconsin Synod for the subsidy it had granted to them.

In the fall of this year, Rev. Hinnenthal, because of illness, was granted a leave of absence for one year, with pay. The parish engaged Reinhold Hinnenthal, a Seminary student, for the instructing of the children, and asked a brother, W. Hinnenthal, of Kaukauna, to provide them with preachers. Again, the fathers of this congregation relied on the free will offerings of the members to meet this special need.

In 1907, when the parish was five years old, it comprised sixty-two families, made up as follows: nine from St. Paul's, twenty-two from Immanuel, and thirty-one from St. Peter's.

About a year after Rev. Hinnenthal again resumed his pastoral work, he received a call to serve a congregation in Goodhue, Minnesota. On October 11, 1908, he was granted his release so that he might serve the Lord in this other field. That same year a call was extended to Rev. A. F.

Herzfeldt, of Eagle River. He accepted the call to serve the Black Creek parish, and was installed the fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20, 1908.

According to the suggestion of a member of the congregation, the Immanuel congregation was canvassed for donations for a bell. This met with favorable results because in the annual meeting of 1910, the congregation chose to purchase an 800 pound bell.

In 1911, when the congregation was ten years old, the membership had grown to thirty-five families. As the years went on, the English language became more common among the early members, so beginning in March, 1914, one English service a month was held.

On December 27, 1914, disaster struck the Immanuel congregation, for on that cold Sunday night, their house of worship was destroyed by fire. In the next meeting of the congregation held January 5, 1915, a building committee was chosen to plan the erection of a new church. In a March meeting, the Immanuel congregation accepted the plan submitted by contractor Schoenrock and Sons. The members of the congregation were to dig out the cellar and supply all the material for the building of the foundation. The members did all this work, donating their labor. The new church was finished by the end of October, and dedicated on November 7, 1915, on one of the most beautiful fall days of the year. The cost of the church was \$7,500.00.

During the fall of 1920, an invitation was extended to the members of St. Paul's congregation at Binghamton to join the Black Creek church. This invitation, however, was not immediately accepted. During the year of 1922 the entire congregation of St. Peter oftended worshipped together with the Immanuel congregation. By the end of the year the St. Peter's congregation formally joined with the church in Black Creek.

Again, sickness struck the shepherd of the Black Creek parish. Rev. Herzfeldt, who had been ailing for some time, was granted a year's leave

of absence in the summer of 1923. In his absence services were conducted by Rev. Steertz, who was then the pastor of the Wisconsin Synod church in Shiocton which was located six miles west of Black Creek. In January, 1924, the Immanuel congregation again invited the members of St. Paul's to join with them. This time the invitation was seriously considered, because of the sickness of the pastor. By that fall all the members of the Binghamton church joined together into one congregation at Black Creek. Now the three churches of the original parish were joined together into one congregation at Black Creek.

In 1926 the Immanuel congregation celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, on October 31st. Rev. Benjamin Schlueter, the district president, was the guest speaker for this occasion. On this festival day, the ladies of the congregation provided dinner and supper for the guests. The joy of the twenty-fifth anniversary had mingled in it a note of grief, for also on this day the congregation granted a peaceful release to Rev. Herzfeldt, who had served it faithfully for nineteen years. The call was extended to Rev. John Masch, who was serving at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. He accepted the call, and was installed on January 9th, 1927.

The Ladies' Aid of the congregation, which was organized in February, 1911, did much in being an aid to the work of the church. Again and again the members of the congregation voted a hearty thanks for all that the ladies did in the church, in the parsonage, and in the school.

Beginning in 1937, English services were held every other Sunday. All other services were conducted in German. The church was redecorated in 1938. In 1939 the German services were cut down to one a month. This arrangement for German and English services remained in effect until the summer of 1945, when it was decided to discontinue German services altogether, except for Communion.

During the summer of 1946, Rev. Masch, who had been serving the congregation since 1927, suffered a heart attack, and was unable to carry on his work. Neighboring pastors conducted services during the pastor's illness. It was God's will that He call His faithful servant, Rev. Masch, to His eternal rest, so he died Sunday evening, September 29, 1946.

To fill the vacancy in the Black Creek pastorate, a call was extended to Rev. Frederick Thierfelder, of Dundas, Wisconsin. Rev. Thierfelder accepted the call, and was installed on January 12, 1947.

The treasurer requested that a change be made in regard to the fixing of church dues. The congregation then agreed to accept a voluntary contribution system, providing each communicant with weekly envelopes for local and synodical purposes.

During the summer of 1947, it was noticed that the school was in need of repair and that it also needed a new heating unit. After considering this problem, the congregation decided to install a new furnace in the church, and remodel the church basement. This project was completed during the summer of 1948. After this was finished, confirmation classes were held in the church basement, and the school house could then be disposed of.

For a few years the congregation was considering the advisability of remodeling the parsonage, or of building a new one. In every case it was decided that building a new dwelling would be more practical than remodeling the old one. This was done during the summer of 1949. The old parsonage was sold for \$2,300.00, and moved away. The new parsonage was then built on the same location. While the parsonage was being built, Rev. and Mrs. Thierfelder made their quarters in the school house, which was still in the possession of the congregation. The new parsonage is a nine room brick home, built at the cost of \$19,709.13. This included the work done on the garage.

In 1951 the fiftieth anniversary of the congregation was celebrated.

The interior of the church was again refurbished. New furnishings included new runners and carpeting, and a communion rail was also supplied. All these things were given as a donation by a late member of the congregation. The entire cost of the renovating was taken care of by his bequest to the congregation. During the closing years of his life, he had a great concern for the church. This prompted him to make Immanuel congregation the beneficiary of a \$5,000.00 life insurance policy. The congregation then numbered 462 souls, 316 communicants with 94 enrolled in Sunday school.

In early 1956 Rev. Thierfelder was granted a peaceful release to serve Riverview church in Appleton, Wisconsin. Rev. Arden Wood was called from the "wilderness of South Dakota" to serve the congregation in Black Creek. He accepted the call and was ordained on January 29, 1956. He currently serves the congregation in Black Creek.

Keeping in mind the value of Christian education, Immanuel congregation joined the Fox Valley Lutheran High School association along with twelve other congregations. They were responsible for the operating and financial support of Fox Valley Lutheran High School, a newly established high school in Appleton. During this year, 1957, vacation Bible school was also started at Immanuel congregation with a total of 96 students.

The congregation continued to grow. It grew enough to cause concern for everything being done "decently and in order." Therefore in 1964 the Ushers Club was formed. A year later, 1965, was another banner year. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the church building erected in 1915 which was still being used. The special event was observed on September 19th. 1965 statistics included 656 souls, 427 communicants, 181 in Sunday school, and 125 in vacation Bible school.

As the church grew, so did the awareness of the lack of facilities for such a multitude of people. The church planning committee members



were elected to act as the building committee members in 1966. They undertook their task with the zeal and earnestness of the hard working men that they were. Plans were submitted and carefully scrutinized. The wheels of the congregation were in motion. Ten acres of land were purchased on the southeast side of Black Creek in 1967 for \$2,000.00 per acre. Ground-breaking ceremonies were held on October 13, 1968. Less than a year later the congregation participated in the laying of the cornerstone on June 29th.

People's faces were aglow with enthusiasm as they eagerly looked forward to worshipping in their new building dedicated to God. They were able to do this in one of four dedication services held on June 28, 1970. Guest preachers included former Rev. Thierfelder(8:00 and 10:30 a.m.), Rev. E. Stelter(3:00 p.m.), and Rev. T. Baganz(7:30 p.m.). After the dedication, members realized that their task was cut out for them. The total project cost ran in excess of \$250,000.00.

God works in mysterious ways. A member of Immanuel congregation died shortly after the church was finally settled into as a house of worship. This man was not well-liked by many in the community as he was considered a "miserly and cantankerous old fellow." For a small town, population still not above 1,000, he had amassed a great fortune worth almost \$500,000.00. Providing only for the continued support of his widow, he gave all the rest of his money to charities so that relatives would not have to fight over it. The Lord moved this man's heart to make Immanuel congregation a beneficiary of money to the tune of \$100,000.00. (Other churches, of which he had once been a member, got far lesser amounts. One church in town didn't receive any benefits. This enraged the pastor of that church so much that he began to rant and rave against the other churches in the small community of Black Creek. He did this so much so that his congregation was finally forced to compel him to leave!).

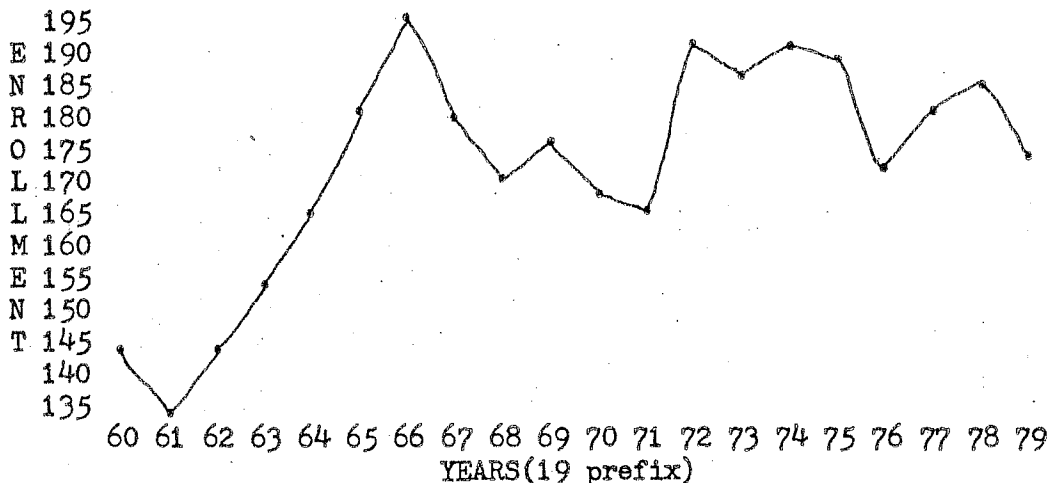
The congregation, with the town, is still continuing to grow. The church, once standing prominently alone, is now surrounded by new homes. As the church grows, so do the programs. In 1971 Lutheran Girl Pioneers was organized, followed shortly by Lutheran Boy Pioneers in 1973. The 800 pound bell bought for the old church in 1910 was electrified and made a part of the new church in 1972. Speaking of the old church, it still stands today next to the parsonage. It was sold to an interested party from Chicago who collects pipe organs. He uses it mainly for storage but every so often one can hear a strain of a familiar tune coming from the "old Lutheran church."

Immanuel congregation's new house of God, though still critically examined by the casual passerby as to the style of architecture(cf. picture), has ample facilities. In 1973 it became the first place that Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Services established as a base outside of Milwaukee. This led to the further establishment WLCFS offices in other parts of Wisconsin. Immanuel congregation is presently the base for two expert personnel of WLCFS.

On July 29, 1976, the congregation learned that former pastor Frederick Thierfelder was called to his Savior's side. By this time all additions and finishing touches had been added and completed in connection with the church and the church property. The parking lot was paved and the entire church was carpeted in anticipation of the congregation's 75th anniversary. The congregation was led in worship by the present pastor Arden Wood and edified by the sermon of guest preacher Clarence Koepsell of Oshkosh, WI. The beauty of the anniversary and celebration was furthered enhanced by the participation of the Fox Valley Lutheran high school choir. The 75th anniversary found Immanuel congregation with 855 souls, 619 communicants, 173 in Sunday school, and 114 in vacation Bible school.

The statistics for Immanuel congregation are fascinating especially in connection with Sunday school attendance and vacation Bible school. After the initial enrollment of 96 in 1957 the VBS has had a constant enrollment averaging 125 students.

Sunday School Attendance



But that is where the statistics stop. No Christian day school has been started.

Certainly it can be seen as a deficit in an otherwise suitable situation. The "blame" is not to be placed on the congregation or pastor, per se. The circumstances cause one to reflect more closely at the situation and environs feasible for starting and maintaining a CDS. The church is definitely suited for the establishment of a CDS. The basemant contains four individual, furnished rooms capable of teaching purposes.

Why no Christian day school? Perhaps it would be better to ask if it is necessary for every Wisconsin Synod church to have a CDS? For Immanuel congregation the answer would presently seem to be no (but hopefully yes in the future). Immanuel is located in a small town, population less than 1,000. The public school system is carefully scrutinized by the pupils' concerned parents and therefore the result is a quality education though it may not be strictly orthodox Lutheranism. The Black Creek public grade

school is a fine, new facility with very qualified teachers. The smallness of the community doesn't allow for a practicing atheist to be a school teacher in this "closed" system. In fact, the principal and the eighth grade male teacher are pillar members of Immanuel congregation. They also are the two teachers responsible for the running and well-being of the public grade school system. By law, public teachers aren't allowed to teach religion but a definite "Christian atmosphere" does prevail in the public school system of Black Creek.

When a letter was sent to the congregation of Immanuel concerning the establishing of a Christian day school, the reactions were somewhat unfavorable. "Why do we need a CDS when we already have a good public grade school?" "How can we afford a CDS when we can hardly meet the monthly notes and utility bills for the new church?" These comments were heard from a former president of the church council, but cannot be taken as against Christian education. All of his children attended Fox Valley Lutheran high school in Appleton. The reactions to the letter seemed to indicate an overall economic concern. The congregation had extended themselves in providing a new house of worship and felt they could do no more. They only need to look at their past history for encouragement. The congregation often was run by free will offerings during times of hardship and adversity. (Statistics also collaborate in revealing that average communicant member giving was and is above the average communicant member giving for the Northern Wisconsin District.) Even though worried about money, the past history of Immanuel congregation shows that financial difficulties were always overcome and not really that much of a concern.

Immanuel congregation cannot presently be faulted. The spirit of Christian education once was prevalent in their early history (another lesson the congregation might learn from their forefathers). By ridding

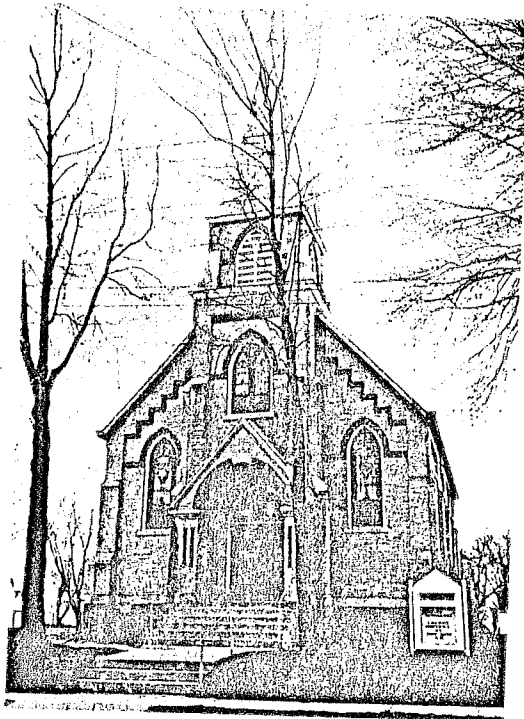
themselves of the school which they once had, they perhaps lost some of the zeal and intensity which they had for the instructing of their children. In looking at statistics, once again, another subliminal reason could be the cause for the neglect of a Christian day school. Early statistics include the number of subscribers to Gemeinde Blatt and the Northwestern Lutheran. Concerning this fact, Immanuel congregation had no members of the congregation as subscribers to these publications (which is still a glaring fault of this congregation as well as many others throughout the Synod!). The value of a CDS was not not constantly kept before the members of Immanuel congregation.

All is not lost though, Immanuel congregation still has an active concern for Christian education. As was previously stated, Immanuel congregation joined the federation of churches in 1957 for continued support of Fox Valley Lutheran high school. This was a big step for an "outlying" congregation 15 miles to the north of Appleton, when Appleton could be considered the center of Wisconsin Synod Lutheranism in the Fox River Valley area. In recent years, other positive steps have been taken concerning Christian education. The Pioneer programs are a step in the direction of once more putting Christian education before the congregation via means of the fledgling steps of Christian fellowship.

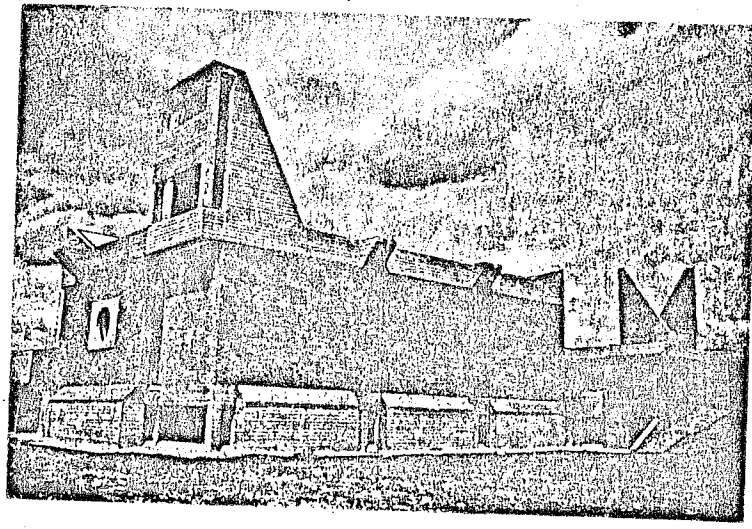
Even though the Sunday school and the vacation Bible school are well attended and staffed, the need for a Christian day school doesn't seem as demanding in Immanuel congregation. The detriment is seen in the number of sons of the congregation who have entered the full time preaching and teaching ministry. The number is a definitely small six considering the church will soon be eighty years old. But after careful reflection, the author of this paper finds little hope (or feasibility) in the establishment of a Christian day school in the near future of Immanuel congregation especially

in view of the circumstances and environment. One can only commend the congregation for its early beginnings of Christian education, though not continued, and its wholehearted support for continued Christian education.

The latest statistical information(1979) shows that Immanuel congregation numbers 884 souls, 640 communicants, 179 in Sunday school(with 23 teachers), and 122 in vacation Bible school.



*Built 1915*



*Built 1969*

S O U R C E S of I N F O R M A T I O N

Dedication booklet of Immanuel Lutheran congregation(with services).

Fiftieth Anniversary booklet.

Seventy-fifth Anniversary booklet.

Various members of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Wood, Arden L., Present pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Parish records.

Congregational minutes.