

"YOU ARE PETER, AND ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH"

Church History Term Paper  
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In this day, when money seems to be tight everywhere and morality seems nonexistent, it is very refreshing and miraculous to see God's Word breaking forth and growing among the weeds in this earthly garden. God's Word is very precious. It is meant for us to use and to spread over all the world. God commanded His disciples and us to "go into all the world preaching and teaching all nations." This command is not only a duty and responsibility but it is a great privilege for us.

The established church is the most obvious and effective way to spread God's Word to all people. The church calls a minister to be their shepherd and bring a sense of order into their midst. The church also has other workers who together achieve one single goal: spreading the Word of God. Today, it can be disheartening to see our WELS missions and schools closing. The main problem is usually one of two things: lack of money or lack of interest. Both these problems tell us what kind of society we live in today. We are the ME generation, people who want the best for themselves and care little for the people around them. Religion is even losing the sacred place it once held in the eyes of people. With all the sex and money scandals of the "electronic evangelists" of today, religion is definitely taking a bum rap. It should tell us what kind of world we live in when people try to stone or assassinate the pope. Where has all the respect for religion gone? Why do our young people turn to suicide instead of God to solve their problems? Why is there an increase in teenage pregnancies? Why is abortion not looked upon as murder?

I do not have all the answers to these questions, but I do know where we can find the answers and help we so desperately need. Our help and strength is

found in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Instead of sitting back on our good intentions, we must get out into the world and tell people of the love our Savior has for them. Our Christian goals have not changed over the years, only our priorities. WE must get our priorities back on track, on God's track.

Through all the sadness and sin the world has to give us, it is very refreshing to see God's plan of salvation still growing in our world. Churches are growing. There is a need for God and church in our life now more than ever!

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin is a perfect example for us to view the miraculous effect of God's Word. Fond du Lac has five <sup>WELS</sup> ~~Christian~~ churches with three ~~and~~ Christian grade schools. What a blessing for us to see! Another great blessing we are going to look at in this paper is how one church helped three other churches begin and grow. St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church began our Lutheran religion rolling in Fond du Lac.

This paper will look at the relationship between the mother church, St. Peter's, and its three daughter churches: Redeemer, Good Shepherd, and Faith Lutheran churches. We will be looking at the churches' <sup>origins</sup> (start), location in town, and how they have grown and prospered over the years. To me, Fond du Lac is a unique situation because all the Lutheran churches have their roots in St. Peter's. St. Peter's was gladly there to help get these churches started. From one tiny seed, a bountiful harvest was reaped. As Jesus Christ talked about the tiny mustard seed and how powerful it was, so we too can see the power of God's Word and how it grew and nourished the churches in the town of Fond du Lac. As Jesus told Saint Peter the churches one and true foundation is on

*St. Paul's  
North Fond du Lac  
might also  
be included*

Christ and His Word, so these churches are built on the solid cornerstone of the Bible and the encouragement, hopes, and prayers of St. Peter's Lutheran Church.

The Wisconsin Synod was barely eight years old when St. Peter's Lutheran Church was organized and founded. On August 15, 1858, forty-seven men signed the constitution and the birth of this amazing church began. One attribute one must admire was the early members zeal and speed in becoming involved. In October 1858, St. Peter's joined the Wisconsin Synod and called its first pastor. This was quite an achievement for a church which was started by a few dedicated families.

Why was Fond du Lac chosen as the site for the church? This answer is very simple: Fond du Lac's perfect location on Lake Winnebago. Fond du Lac was the hub of all the business which was taking place at that time. At its conception, the logging and trapping businesses were very big in the Fond du Lac area. Because of this, quite a few immigrants decided to make Fond du Lac their home. Religion was a very important to these new settlers and their love for their Savior was the means by which St. Peter's was established. The missionary who began and helped this newly formed church flourish was Gottlieb Fachtman. I suspect his great desire for missions was what inspired St. Peter's future. Pastor Fachtman accepted the position as pastor on the condition that he could continue his mission endeavors. What a great example he must have set for St. Peter's early members!

St. Peter's suffered through the wars and depression. With each oncoming disaster, its members seemed to thrive instead of weaken. The church suffered through two huge lodge controversies where quite a few members <sup>purposely</sup> where (let go) <sub>of</sub>. Two fires during this church's history also did not weaken its members' faith.

During the Great Depression, the church was able to pay off its great debt and become debt free. What a wonderful miracle that was! Truly God's power and might were at work in this church.

Indeed, the history of St. Peter's is very colorful and fact filled.

Somehow it's members always kept their focus on mission endeavors. Two pastors which deserve a great deal of credit for this movement are Pastor Fachtman and Pastor Gerhard Pieper. These men always put a great importance on God's Word and what it can do in a Christian's life. Preaching and maintaining God's Word in all its truth and purity became their chief responsibility. God tells us where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be with them. This certainly has held true for St. Peter's over the years.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church is a very old, well established, and important church in the development of the Wisconsin Synod. St. Peter's celebrated its centennial in 1958, and in 1983 celebrated its 125th anniversary. God has truly blessed this church! Today, St. Peter's communicants number 1494 with 1960 souls in total membership. The church has had Fond du Lac grow up around it. It proudly stands in the center of the city and is easily accessible from all parts of town. This location has been very important for the growth of the school. St. Peter's is blessed with two pastors, nine teachers, and a growing congregation. Today's school enrollment is 260 children with each new school year this number continues to grow. St. Peter's, along with the help and guidance of Hans K. Mousa, played a very large part in the founding of Winnebago Luther Academy. This Christian high school was once located on St. Peter's grounds but due to the ever increasing enrollment the Academy

*Pastor  
H. E. Bergmann  
also deserves  
mention*

built new facilities in June 1955. Winnebago Lutheran Academy is the second oldest Lutheran high school in our synod.

St. Peter's began as a tiny acorn and throughout the years has grown into a mighty oak, giving shelter and strength to the smaller oak trees that have grown from and along side it. St. Peter's is located in the heart of the city and began its missions on the outskirts of Fond du Lac. With St. Peter's financial and spiritual support, Faith and Good Shepherd Churches were able to build new churches, and Faith and Redeemer Churches saw their dream of Christian education become a reality.

St. Peter's first mission church was begun in North Fond du Lac in 1901. With the railroad starting in North Fond du Lac, St. Peter's had the insight to see the need for a church for the people who came to work and settle there. A lot was purchased and through donations and member loans a church was constructed and named St. Paul's Lutheran Church. This church still stands today. It's Christian day school has been closed due to hard times and lack of children to fill the classrooms. But St. Paul's is optimistic <sup>about</sup> <sup>my</sup> to reopen the school when church attendance increases.

Redeemer Lutheran Church was the second mission outreach of St. Peter's Church. St. Peter's congregation was becoming too large and hard to manage for one pastor. During many church meetings, it was decided to break forth into new mission ground. This topic of discussion began in 1928 and was discussed every year following. No real or immediate action was taken until 1936. St. Peter's finally decided to take action and began their mission efforts in the western portion of the city. Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church was settled on the western border of the city <sup>outskirts</sup> ~~limits~~. Surrounding this new mission was miles and miles of farmland. With St. Peter's members attending and lending

financial support, Redeemer was off to a good start. On October 13, 1939, Pastor Waldemar Pless was called as the first pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church.

The church site proved to be very beneficial for the church. Today instead of farmland and animals grazing around the church, we see homes and apartment complexes. The cattle has<sup>y</sup> been replaced by families. Highway 41 makes the church very accessible to travelers and very easy to find. With two shopping malls in the vicinity and more building projects on the other side of Highway 41, the church is now in the hub of the business section.

Redeemer began their Christian Day school in 1962 and enrollment has been increasing ever since. Today the enrollment stands at 127 students with six teachers serving the school.

The present church was built and dedicated in 1956. Redeemer will celebrate it's 50th anniversary in October 1989. One of the churches main hopes and goals is to be debt free at that time. The membership stands at 561 communicants and 806 souls. The church is very strong in Sunday School and has a variety of groups and activities. Pastor Marvin Putz is presently serving Redeemer Lutheran Church.

St. Peter's was very wise and prudent in beginning its mission efforts in the western part of town. This area has increased and grown to be a very vital portion of the community. Redeemer has grown and flourished into a church which continues in the tradition of growing in God's Grace.

The next successful mission outreach of St. Peter's was Faith Lutheran Church. Its growth and strength is remarkable. Usually when we see a church up for sale, it is a sad and disheartening. This is not true in the case of Faith. Presently, the church is for sale so the congregation may build a

larger church to hold it's fast growing congregation.

In 1946, St. Peter's attempted a very great task. During a congregational meeting, Pastor Pieper suggested a mission be built on the east side of Fond du Lac. This suggestion was so enthusiastically received Pastor Pieper dared to make another proposition during the same meeting. Why not start a second mission of the south side of town too? The minutes from this meeting showed a unanimous support for these two new missions. In 1946, Pastor John Raabe was called to both missions. There was definitely a zeal for missions during this time. Not one but TWO missions were begun at the same time! On February 10, 1947, Faith Lutheran Church was established with sixteen voters present in the basement of St. Peter's Church. Again as we have noted before, the speed in which the mission was started is remarkable. As with other missions, services were held in funeral homes and store fronts until a permanent site could be built. In two short years, the basement church was built and dedicated on April 18, 1948. At that time the church had 50 communicants.

A major interest of Faith Church was Christian education and establishing a school. From 1947 through 1959, the children of Faith attended St. Peter's School. During 1959 through 1961, Faith supplied and supported a teacher at St. Peter's. In 1961, Faith had accomplished its goal and had a school of its own. With two teachers and 67 students in attendance, they were off to a very good start. By 1968, the staff of teachers had risen to 5 teachers and 120 students.

The church and school which were built in 1960 were becoming too small and cramped to meet the needs of the growing congregation. Something needed

to be done so the church decided to build a new school facility with hopes that a new church structure would soon follow. Ten acres of land were purchased about two miles east of the present location and construction of the new school began. In 1983, the new school was finished and dedicated to the glory of God. The land houses a modern six room school with enough land to build the church. As soon as the present church is sold. Faith plans to build a new church next to the school.

What a joy it is to see such rapid and steady growth in a new congregation! Again St. Peter's is credited with making this mission venture a success. St. Peter's offered Faith low interest loans plus they paid the interest for the first several years. St. Peter's members also helped in canvassing the area for prospective members. What a great zeal and desire we see for missions!

By 1956, Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church was self supporting and taken off the mission status. Faith kept up with its building projects and in 1969 installed a beautiful carillon tower to ring out praises to the Lord.

The school has definitely helped with the growth of Faith Church. Just as it started with twenty young families, today the 1010 members are still comprised with many young families. The church's eastern location is ideal since there is easy access to Highway 23.

The goals for the future look promising. Faith has just celebrated its 40th anniversary in February 1987. Faith's cradle roll and membership is on a constant upswing and Pastor Mark Schroeder says all is in the Lord's hands; but humanly speaking, the future looks bright for Faith's continued growth.

The southern mission outreach started by St. Peter's Church in 1946 is Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. In February 1987, Good Shepherd celebrated its 40th anniversary. What a blessed outreach and opportunity God blessed St. Peter's Church with.

The growth of Good Shepherd Church has not been as rapid as the other mission efforts of St. Peter's. Good Shepherd's first permanent location was not far from St. Peter's. This afforded members of St. Peter's the option of attending either church because of the accessible bus routes and easy walking distance. Good Shepherd began as a basement church squeezed into two lots on Fourteenth Street. The church was too small to serve the needs of its members and there was no hope for expansion. Plans were made to build onto the present church but due to a change of pastors, the plan of adding an addition was scrapped. The church decided to purchase five acres of land in the southern "boon docks" of town. While this building project was going on, the church services were held in a store front, next to the basement church which was built in 1949.

On October 4, 1964, Good Shepherd Church opened its doors in its new location. In 1967, Good Shepherd also built a parsonage right next to the church.

Good Shepherd faced problems the other missions did not have to deal with. In July 1957, Good Shepherd became a self supporting church and continued to spread God's precious Word. St. Peter's offered Good Shepherd a loan for the purpose of starting a school, but Good Shepherd declined it. There was no real interest in starting a school since St. Peter's was so accessible and most of their children attended St. Peter's School. In 1960, membership dropped from

225 souls to 150 souls. Many families left Good Shepherd Church to attend Faith Church. The members' main reason for leaving was due to school facilities being available at Faith. Because Good Shepherd was not interested in a school, the young families looked elsewhere for Christian education. Many families voiced the opinion of preferring to be members of a congregation which offered a Christian Day school.

A survey recently taken shows many people drive right past Good Shepherd and attend churches which do supply Christian Day schools. As years pass, public opinion does not seem to change that drastically.

As in the case of Redeemer, what once was considered farmland and the "boonies" is now a very busy part of Fond du Lac. Homes and apartment buildings have sprung up around Good Shepherd. Major roads have been built which pass the church. Good Shepherd has a blessed opportunity for growth with these new neighborhoods springing up around them. However, the lack of a Christian Day school seems to be hindering the churches growth potential.

On an upbeat note, in January of this year a land use committess was organized to look into the feasibility of building an education module. The Sunday School enrollment has increased immensely and has outgrown the use of the church's basement. Quarters are cramped for all the children to attend. High on the pastor's agenda is the plan of beginning a school. With the encouragement of a growing Sunday School, Pastor Paul Metzger sees a real need for the school.

Former pastors of Good Shepherd seem to agree the lack of a Christian Day school has hindered the church's growth. The location is perfect and there is

plenty of land available next to the church for this expansion. God will decide the proper decision for Good Shepherd's school.

Presently, twelve children from the church attend St. Peter's School with one student at Redeemer and one student at Faith. Good Shepherd is made up of 160+ families with 291 communicants and 376 souls.

As we have seen with the other mission churches, a school has helped in their growth and development. But the reason for a school must be set in place; is the school there to help the church or the church there to help the school?

Before concluding, I think it only fair we turn our attention to one more church which St. Peter's was somewhat involved with either directly or indirectly. Luther Memorial Church is a member of the CLC Synod. In 1985, this church and school celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in the ministry. Some call Luther Memorial an illegitimate daughter of St. Peter's, while the present pastor, John Johannes claims absolutely no connection with St. Peter's congregation.

For the official record, Luther Memorial had its formal organization on February 20, 1960. The conception of this church began soon after the Missouri/Wisconsin Synod problems arose. By the convention of 1955, a number of WELS Lutherans thought the Wisconsin Synod had been waiting too long on the Missouri unionist practices. The main scripture reference used in this whole debate and issue was Romans 16:17 where it tells us to mark and avoid those who cause offences.

St. Peter's congregation held numerous meetings throughout this controversy. Finally in 1960, immediate and fateful action was taken. The church

unanimously held to stay with and support the Wisconsin Synod and its position in this controversy. The two pastors, Peiper and Schuetze, along with <sup>two</sup> a school teacher and over four hundred communicants decided to leave St. Peter's because of this decision. The dissenters met that very afternoon and formed their strategy in St. Peter's Church basement. They decided their priorities stood in the field of Christian education and decided to make no claims against St. Peter's for land or property. Their first worship service was held at a local high school with four hundred sixty-nine in attendance. On February 18, 1960, eighty-nine voters assembled to begin Luther Memorial Church. The constitution was signed by eighty-five voters. The remarkable factor to notice during the birth of this church is the quickness and generosity of its members in beginning this church.

While the school was under construction, a temporary school was set up at a local feed mill. School doors opened on September 17, 1960, with 64 children attending. The second school year saw a jump to 80 students. By 1967, enrollment had peaked to over 100 students. It is unfortunate this upward spiral could not continue. Today the enrollment stands at 28 students.

All the land which the church, school, and parsonage rests on was donated freely by a member and his family. Luther Memorial had a great desire to right the wrong they saw and to keep opening the doors to people who did not know about God and His precious Word.

Pastor Gerhard Peiper celebrated his 50th year in the ministry while serving at Luther Memorial Church. In his memory, the bell tower has been dedicated.

Pastor Johannes has been very kind and helpful in supplying me with information on the church. While he answered some of my questions concerning the

growth and developement of Luther Memorial, he was more intent on me understanding the CLC church and its position in the controversy. I, too, agree with him that many of our séminary graduates do not really know what the whole controversy entailed, and the far reaching results it made on all of us. His prayer is that the line of communication can and will remain open in trying to settle this controversy.

Luther Memorial is very close geographically to Good Shepherd Church. It is in a portion of town which is seeing rapid growth of homes and apartment complexes. One reason why Luther Memorial Church's growth has not been rapid is because they are considered unknowns in the world of religion. The pastor feels people do not know enough about their church and synod and many hard feelings still stand in their way.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church lost two of its finest pastors and a large group of its members to this controversy. Whether called an illegitimate daughter or not, St. Peter's did play a part in establishing Luther Memorial Church.

As you can see, St. Peter's pastors and members have truly played an important role in establishing these successful daughter congregations. Each one of these congregations are special in their own right and very unique.

Fond du Lac's future also looks bright regarding growth and developement. The big news in the Fond du Lac area is the possibility of a new business, Quadgraphics to locate its headquarters<sup>2</sup> in Fond du Lac. This company alone would bring 3,000 new jobs to the Fond du Lac area. Many other new businesses are moving to Fond du Lac causing growth and producing many wonderful job opportunities. Although some businesses seem to be in a slump - the Soo Line

Railroad<sup>is</sup> one example - the new businesses are picking up the slack. Summers are especially busy times for the Fond du Lac area. Tourists flock to this city during the various fishing events on Lake Winnebago and of course, the famous Experimental Aircraft Association brings many new faces to the Fond du Lac area. Our WELS churches gladly open their doors to these new families and tourists who are hungry to enter one of the synod's churches.

A recent census taken shows over 36,000 people now call Fond du Lac their home. Projections indicate by the year 2000 40,000+ people will be inhabiting this town.

With all this news, our WELS congregations can expect more families will be building and settling near their churches. These new families will bring new life blood into the church and help strengthen these established WELS churches. Who knows perhaps one more WELS mission will be born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin if there seems to be a need! Only God can foresee the future and guide our churches to continue to enrichen and strengthen our families with the blessed Word of God.

Yes, there are many sad and depressing stories about our churches and missions failing and closing their doors forever. But for every sad story there are many, many happy success stories including the stories found in Fond du Lac. May God continue to bless these pastors and members so their work will continue to flourish and prosper until our Lord comes to call all of us home to Him.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE PASOTORS, PAST AND PRESENT OF

ST PETERS

REDEEMER

FAITH

GOOD SHEPHERD

LUTHER MEMORIAL *SR*

AND TO THE FONDU LAC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND HISTORICAL *CH* SOCIETY