

A CONGREGATION'S HISTORY
REFLECTED THROUGH ITS LADIES AID
(*St. Paul's - Bangor, Wi.*)

Church History
April 16, 1984

by
Steve Olson



LADIES AID SOCIETY - 1914

- 1) W. Sandman, F. Sandman, H. Ballman, J. Krause, W. Meier, F. G. Meyer
- 2) D. Langrehr, J. Horstman, W. Meyer, K. Wehrs, W. Wolter, A. Toepel, Pastor Siegler, P. Zurbuchen, C. Siegler, A. Knueppel, E. Schmaltz, W. Holberg, W. Niedfeldt, A. Heller, L. Berg, W. Miller, A. Struck, L. Hemker, H. Kastenschmidt, F. Klann, W. Pfaff
- 3) K. Kastenschmidt, F. Meier, H. Kock, A. Jandt, F. Vehrenkamp, A. Roeske, W. Ballmann, W. Schwermann,
- 4) W. Walter, F. Pfaff, W. Berg, G. Kremmer, W. Becker H. Selbrede, H. Tessmann, F. Dessner, F. Craig



LADIES AID - 1964

- Back row:** I. Meyer, T. Piske, E. Berg, E. Stello, E. Amborn, Sr., R. Pfaff, R. Sprehn, H. Wehrs, Hy. Meyer, E. Plenge, H. Langrehr, G. Berg, H. Kastenschmidt
- Second row:** J. Langrehr, A. Niedfeldt, G. Niedfeldt, F. Stello, H. Piske, R. Heuer, A. Niedfeldt, E. Niedfeldt, H. Heuer, V. Craig, C. Wehrs
- Third row:** Pastor Siegler*, O. Olson, G. Jandt, C. Friske, C. Meinking, G. Kapanke, Sr., W. Kolterman, O. M. Olson, M. Sprehn, W. Meier, A. Wittmershaus, O. Torvik, E. Manke
- Fourth row:** R. Siegler, G. Schroeder, H. Garbers, A. Sprehn, N. Parmenter, C. Becker, E. Horstman, Treas.; D. Morris, Pres.; O. Berg, V. Pres.; F. Schroeder, F. Herman, R. Berg, L. Path
- Seated, back row:** W. Meyer, A. Miller, J. Horstman, Sec'y.; V. Miller, W. Heuer, R. Meinking, C. Piske, C. Siegler*, J. Krause*, R. Davis, W. Loesching, H. Hussa
- Seated, front row:** W. Stratman, J. Horstman, C. Bushek, W. Sprehn, J. Kaehler, J. Havens, R. Manke, E. Amborn, Jr., C. Barnes, D. Bjorkman, H. Langrehr, A. Schmidt
- Absent Members:** P. Zurbuchen, E. Schroeder, W. Young, A. Meier, M. Young, F. Craig, E. Jandt, F. Miller, R. Berg, H. Thielker, H. Sandman, H. Zabel, L. Chapiewsky, F. Sandman, W. Schlaeger, C. Fossum, J. Kastenschmidt, V. Paulus, E. Richmond, G. E. Kapanke, L. Beddesem, R. Horstman, H. Weinke, W. Gollnik, Fr. Schroeder, C. Huhn, P. Peterson,

Organizations within a congregation serve many and various needs. Just as congregations are organized in order that those sharing a common belief may gather together, so also organizations within the congregation provide opportunities for fellowship among people sharing a common interest. Lutheran Pioneers for boys and girls, youth groups for teenagers, and young adults, couple's clubs for married people, men's clubs, ladies' aids, and the new Owls groups (an organization of Wels senior citizens) are just a sampling of different organizations a congregation may have to provide fellowship opportunities for its members. These organizations are provided by the congregation for the enjoyment of members. What may be "fun" for a youth group may not be "fun" for the Owls and vice versa. But every organization has one thing in common, faith in the Lord Jesus. By offering to fill a spiritual need in its members, organizations make for a healthy congregation taking many opportunities to hear God's Word, to be strengthened by it, and to strengthen one another in the blessed fellowship of the church.

Christian women need ladies' organizations within the church. It is especially important in the society in which we live, a society which is striving at times to take women out of the role God has established for them. The temptations which face a Christian woman living in the 1980's whether she is working in or out of the home come from sources like the National Organization of Women. But there is very likely another group of women at work in your community. They have

been going about their work much longer and much more effectively than we often appreciate. Ladies' aids are good for women and for congregations. The needs of the women of our congregations can still be met through ladies' organizations within the church. Without abandoning their role, women can help to share the Gospel with one another and the world through these groups. This is the case at St. Paul's congregation at Bangor, Wisconsin.

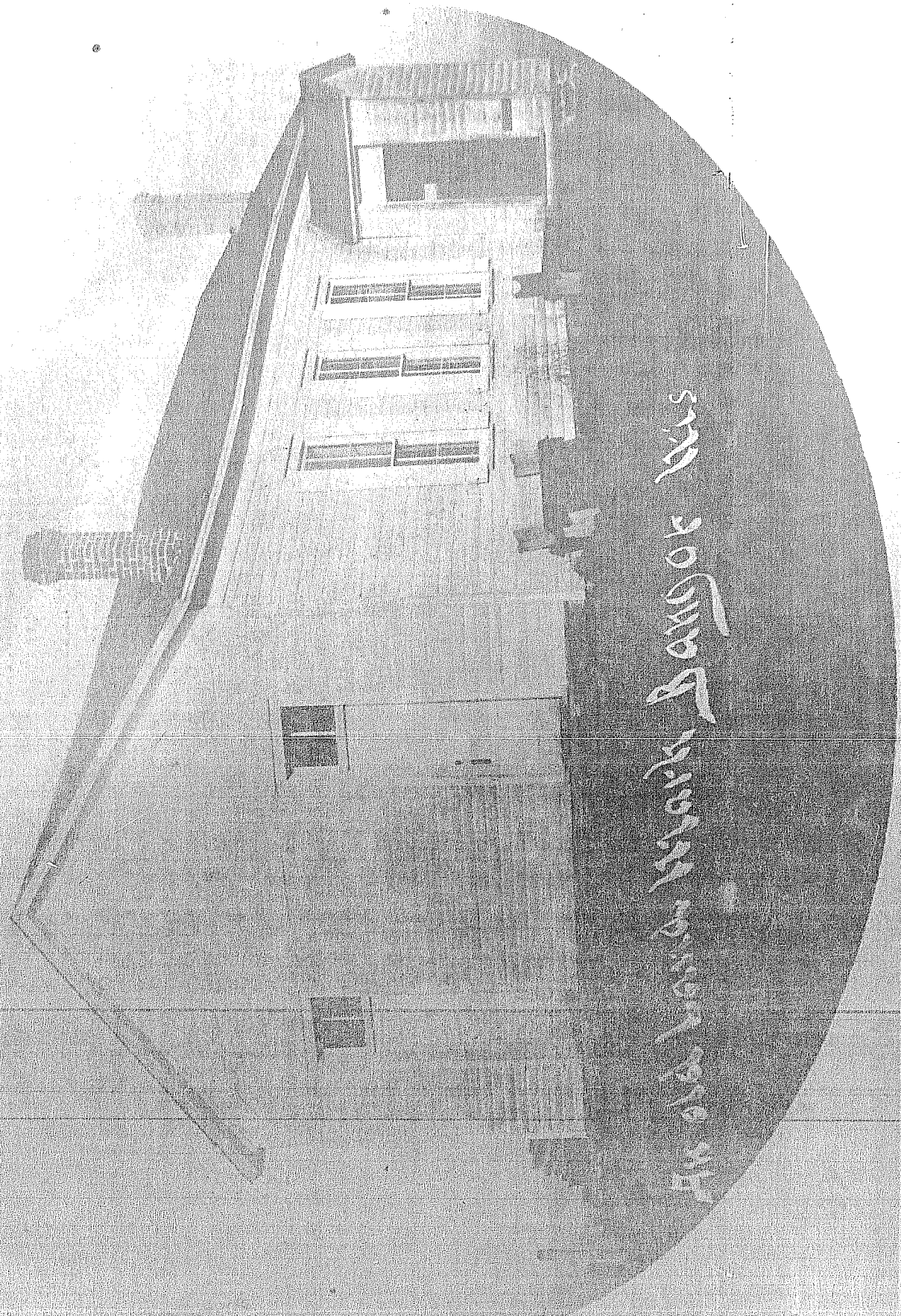
St. Paul's had been started as a mission outreach by St. John's congregation at Barre Mills. In 1888, Pastor Richard Siegler began conducting services at Bangor. Although he had problems of his own to deal with in Bostwick Valley (also known as Barre Mills), he did not let that stand in the way of doing what he could to comply with Jesus' great commission to "be my witnesses." Those problems for the most part centered around the freethinkers. This was a group of Germans primarily who also settled in the area where St. John's was located. These freethinkers were opposed to "the orthodoxy which demanded that members accept without question the theological dogmas laid down by church authorities."¹ They tried to keep Christianity out of Bostwick Valley. Their efforts only served to make St. John's stronger. The congregation grew closer together. These freethinkers were the ones who eventually disappeared from Barre Mills. Rather than the agnostic humanism of the freethinkers, the Gospel of Jesus Christ became the conviction of the people in Barre Mills. Pastor Richard Siegler was "a talented young man, motivated by the Gospel and full of ambition... He bore the brunt of the opposition from the freethinkers... In April of 1887 he began to conduct services on Sunday afternoons at West Salem, and in 1888 he started services at Bangor. With less regularity he also held

services at Portland, which is near Cashton."² Freethinkers from Bangor ventured to Barre Mills on occasion to hear the guest speakers at the freethinker's hall. Pastor Siegler was undoubtedly aware that he would be facing the same opposition to the Gospel in Bangor that he faced in Barre Mills, but this did not stop him. Within two years, the congregation at Bangor was organized and incorporated as St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. The congregation numbered 11 families.

As in mission congregations today, St. Paul's yearned to have a church home. They were thankful that the Baptists in Bangor permitted them to use their church on Sunday afternoons for worship, but it was not like having their own place. When the good people of Bangor donated a school building to the congregation, St. Paul's saw the hand of God at work answering their prayers. Now they had a church home. People in the community knew these German Lutherans were here to stay. People who had been members at Barre Mills ^{but living closer to Bangor} now joined the Bangor congregation. German Lutherans from other areas moved to Bangor. Five years later, there were 40 families making up St. Paul's due to a great extent on the untiring mission work carried on by Pastor Siegler.

The congregation was on its own in 1895. They called their first pastor, Theodore Hartwig. Organizations began to spring up in the congregation. One of these was the Ladies' Aid. As the members became more aware of the work of the church at large (having joined the Wisconsin Synod in 1893), the ladies of the congregation

ST. Paul's first church home, a converted school house.

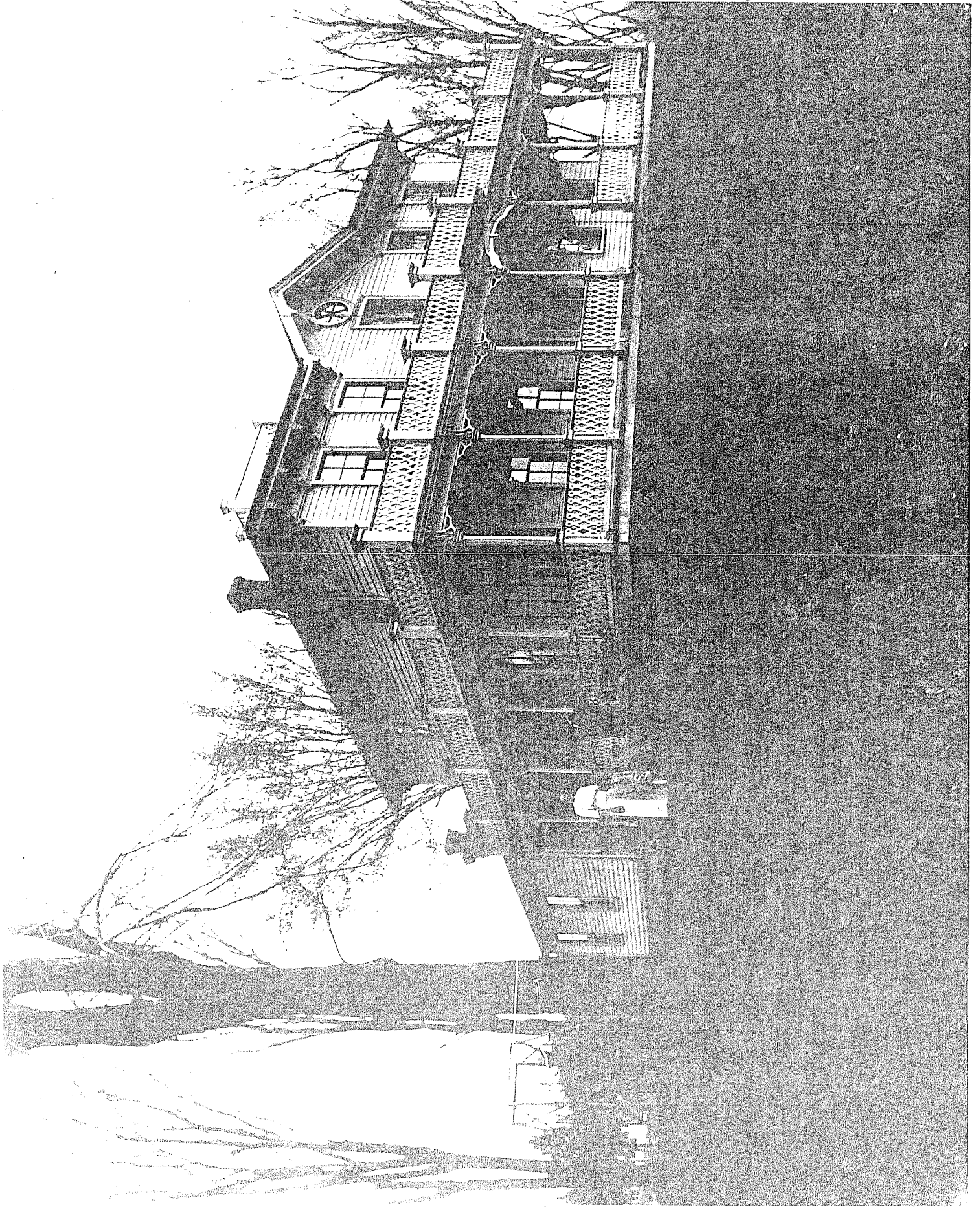


came forth with sacrificial offerings for the support of Synodical work and for the special mission projects.³ In 1896 the congregation purchased a parsonage, a big beautiful home, next to a cemetery for \$2,000. The Lord was showering these German Lutherans in Bangor with his blessings. It had been only 8 years from the time those first services were held in Bangor. Now the congregation was self-supporting with a church building and a parsonage.

There is a saying that where Christians build a church, the devil builds a chapel. The Ladies' Aid had internal problems in these early years. The devil was at work splitting the Ladies' Aid in two. What brought about the strife is hidden. It is the wish of the congregation that it remain hidden. All the records of the Ladies' Aid during this period were destroyed. Suffice it to say that these women sinned, repented, and reorganized in 1909.

We can only speculate on the problems that arose within the Ladies' Aid. But we do know that this period of time from 1895-1909 was a period of many changes for St. Paul's. The rift within the Ladies' Aid is probably indicative of tensions which existed among the whole congregation. As more and more decisions had to be made by this young congregation for their future, we can see how differences of opinion can gradually widen over a period of years. These major decisions which the congregation was facing could not be solved in such a way as to please all the people all the time. But proceeding with the guidance of the Lord, the congregation sought to serve the best interest of all. These are some

St. Paul's first parsonage located next to Fairview Cemetery.



of the questions that needed prayerful consideration: How shall we educate our children? Is the church too small? Where should we build, if this church is too small? Should we build on the 6 acres of land on which the parsonage is built? If so, should the cemetery next to the parsonage become a church cemetery? By looking briefly at the history of the congregation and the town of Bangor during this period, we can see what things may have attributed to the strife within the Ladies' Aid and the congregation.

The community of Bangor took pride in the education of their children. Perhaps this was do to the influence of the freethinkers living in the area who were totally committed to education. The welfare of the children of the community was a prime concern to the residents of Bangor. Although the town was named by some Welsh settlers, there was a large German population who saw a need for education. "The German population established a German school in the Concordia Hall."⁴ Bangor's school system was "surpassed by no other town in the county" in 1880.⁵ There were seven school buildings at this time, one of which may have been that which was donated to serve as St. Paul's first church. In spite of the fine education that the town of Bangor offered its residents, the members of St. Paul's were determined to have a Christian Day School. They had seen the blessings of a Christian Day School at St. John's in Barre Mills. No matter how fine a public school system is, the members of St. Paul's knew that it lacked "the one thing needful."

The blessings of a Christian Day School are summarized beautifully in the 1914 anniversary booklet of St. Paul's congregation.

A translation follows:

"One of the greatest blessings to any congregation is the parochial school. Such a school is the hope of the congregation for a "healthy" growth in faith. A strong faith and a Christian life has its roots in Christian education at home and at school. In this, the school will support the Christian home and congregation. Language alone is not at issue. Even though the children are to be instructed not only in the English language but also in our beautiful German mother tongue, this is not of primary concern. But the religious instruction which the youth will receive through God's Word (is of prime concern). Whether the children are instructed in English or German, also if they are taught the same subjects as in public schools, their instruction will stand under the guidance of God's Word so that the children live as Christians, grow up to be faithful members of the congregation and future heirs of eternal life."

During those early years of the congregation, the members were happy with their small church building on the southwest end of town. They had been conducting school during the summer months in this building. The pastor did the bulk of the educating. But still the members looked forward to a time when they could have a full time school. As the congregation continued to grow, that prayer was answered as well. In 1909 St. Paul's would build a new church with accommodations for a full time school in the basement.

Before all this would take place, all those major decisions mentioned earlier would have to ^{be} worked out. Another decision was added when Pastor Hartwig was called to another parish in 1904. The Lord sent Pastor William Rader to serve the congregation from

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1904-1909. He had to address the problems that were brewing as the congregation began to grow too large for their first church building. Some wanted a new church building. Others did not think it was necessary. Some wanted the church built on the 6 acres of land accompanying the parsonage. Others felt that the location of the church on the hill, over the "wooden bridge," would make it difficult to get to church in bad weather. Several times the congregation voted on where to build the church. In the spring, it was voted to build next to the parsonage. As winter approached, the congregation voted not to build as they envisioned trying to get to church in the winter months. Some wanted to make the cemetery next to the parsonage a Lutheran cemetery. Others did not want this as they foresaw future problems with non-members requesting burial lots. If only the church had not grown so large, none of these problems would have arisen. You can almost sense this kind of thinking going on, instead of thinking of the tremendous blessings and opportunities which the Lord was placing in the hands of his little flock in Bangor. "On November 22, 1908, two weeks after Pastor Rader had accepted a call to Prairie Du Chien, the decision was made to purchase three lots on which the present church and parsonage are located."⁷ This sight is on the north end of town and is easily accessible by all. The Lord has richly blessed that decision as the last 75 years reveal.

When Pastor Carl Siegler (nephew to Pastor Richard Siegler who began mission work in Bangor) accepted the Lord's call to come to

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church under construction in 1909.



Bangor in 1909, he knew that there were problems in the congregation. He had experienced similar tensions to those present at St. Paul's in the congregation he had been serving. He was determined to keep the congregation together. He was immediately thrown into the building project of the new church. But this did not so preoccupy his time that he was unaware of the other needs of the congregation. The Ladies' Aid was a concern to him. He did not like the tension prevalent there. He disbanded the Ladies' Aid impressing upon the women that organizations within the congregation must work together or not at all.

The ladies of the congregation were willing to put their personal feelings behind them. The fruits of repentance were evident at the dedication service of the new church building. "The ladies of the congregation served dinner, and through it all there was a heavy wet snowfall, which apparently did little to discourage the joy of the occasion and the attendance."⁸ The congregation had crossed the hump. It was time to lay aside personal animosities and get down to the work of the church, growing in and sharing with one another and the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Once St. Paul's was firmly established in their new building, everything seemed to fall in place. "Pastor C.W. Siegler reestablished the Christian Day School as soon as the basement of the new church was ready to be used."⁹ "The Ladies Aid Society was reorganized in 1909 after the work of building the church had been completed."¹⁰ Pastor C.W. Siegler provided the steady influence which the

congregation and the Ladies Aid needed. The Lord blessed the congregation by allowing Pastor Siegler a ministry of 37 years in Bangor.

Pastor Siegler was happy to reorganize the Ladies Aid. He was also eager to bury whatever strife might have existed within the organization. In order to do this, he placed a great deal of the work of the Ladies Aid on his own shoulders. . . One way he saw to unify this body of women was to take away from them as many opportunities to sin as possible. Instead of having officers elected from the organization, a time when personalities often come to the forefront, he appointed his own President, Vice-president, Secretary, and Treasurer. He appointed himself to these offices. The Ladies Aid began in 1909 with 14 members. By 1914, just 5 years later, there were 58 members. The Ladies Aid continued to grow in number and unity. They were motivated to serve the Lord in every capacity possible. The Ladies Aid has served as motivation and example for the rest of the congregation ever since it began in 1909.

The lady members of St. Paul's congregation have the opportunity to get involved in most of the projects and responsibilities of the local congregation as well as the church at large. There are committees within the Ladies Aid who minister to the sick and shut ins, who help to beautify the church for the worship service, and who help to spread the Gospel around the world. The needs of the Christian day school have always been a major concern to the Ladies Aid. A discussion of these committees and their work will follow.

Two committees do the bulk of the work with the sick and those who are unable to attend church on a regular basis do to health reasons. This is not to say that the pastor does not care for them. The pastors have always been diligent and faithful in the spiritual care of these people. It is the Sunshine and Visiting Committees who represent the entire Ladies Aid bringing joy to these people in different ways. The Visiting Committee did not come into existence until 1963. Before this time, the Sunshine Committee took care of all the work. They sent out "get well" and sympathy cards at appropriate times to members. But when in 1962 the church council asked the Sunshine Committee of the Ladies Aid to organize and send out Birthday greetings to all members of the congregation, they knew that they would need help to keep up on their work with the sick and elderly. In 1963 it was decided to organize a Visiting Committee to do the "foot work" by visiting the sick and elderly in their homes. The Sunshine committee was left with the "book work" so to speak. They took care of sending out devotional booklets, such as Meditations, to the elderly. They also sent out the birthday, get well, and sympathy cards to members. During the Christmas season these two committees often work together with the pastor delivering fruit baskets to the elderly. Ladies are elected to the Sunshine Committee for two year terms. At each Ladies' Aid meeting, four women are elected to serve as the Visiting Committee for that month. The Sunshine Committee is made up of two people. All the members have an opportunity to serve on these committees several times. This is a golden opportunity for members to get to know one another, to experience Christian fellowship, and to carry out Christ's command to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Not only are the ladies involved in mission work at home within the congregation, but they are also concerned about the work of the church at large. In 1931, \$10 was given to a Pastor's family in Little Rock, Arkansas who was in need. In spite of the great depression the ladies were eager to help these fellow Christians. During World War II, the ladies sent a subscription of The Northwestern Lutheran out to each member of St. Paul's congregation serving in the military. Christmas cards were also sent to these men. They sent goods to war-sufferers in European countries. They adopted two families needing aid overseas. In 1946, the ladies began sending \$10 annually to the Apache Indian Mission in Arizona as a Christmas gift. Later they also began sending Christmas gifts to Bethesda and to the Deaf Institute. They sent clothes to the Apache mission. They donated money to send Bibles into Rhodesia. When the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society began to organize in the early 1960's, St. Paul's women also got involved. They gathered together with women from all over our Synod to support mission work. The Ladies Aid sent a contribution to the Medical Mission in Malawi annually. They made bandages for the nursing station there. They are presently making baby clothes for the African children. They have their "mite boxes." At St. Paul's, the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society is incorporated into the Ladies Aid. In this way more women see and hear about our Synod's work at home and abroad.

The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society, the Sunshine Committee, and the Visiting Committee are probably the most noticeable things

which the Ladies Aid is doing. Much of their work goes virtually unnoticed. Just as at home where mom is often taken for granted, so also in the church the work of the Ladies Aid is often taken for granted. The Ladies Aid serves the congregation in countless ways. They support the congregation with funds to improve the church building and grounds. They have replaced the hymnals and recovered others with their offerings. They have paid for janitorial equipment and kitchen equipment. They have given of their time for cleaning, painting, decorating, and beautifying the church. They serve meals for funerals, weddings, church pot lucks and anniversaries, welcoming and farewell dinners for church workers and the like. The ladies give of their talents to make communion cloths and so on. The Ladies Aid is always there with their time, talents, and treasures for the work of the Lord and his church.

The ladies have always shown a special interest in the Christian Day School. ~~Because~~ the full time school has been in existence since 1909, many of the women in the Ladies Aid remember attending school in the church basement. They know the blessings of Christian education from first hand experience. Already in the 1920's, the Ladies Aid was contributing \$5 per month toward the teacher's salary. They painted and cleaned at the school. (Now the Parent Teachers Association takes care of this.) They still help purchase books and supplies for the school. They rejoiced with the rest of the congregation when the day school grew to such a size that a new school had to be built. This project was undertaken in 1953 while Pastor Arden Stuebs was ser-

ving the congregation. The present pastor, Reverend Reginald Siegler, saw the school continue to grow so that additions to the school were necessary. This same concern for elementary education was directed to high school education when an area Lutheran High School was built in Onalaska. The Ladies Aid became involved with the ladies of other congregations in the area in the Luther High Auxillary. The women encouraged their husbands to get involved at Luther High sodding, cleaning, and fixing. In all facets of Christian education, the ladies have played a prominent role in keeping Christ in the center of their children's lives.

When Pastor Arden Stuebs was called to Bangor in 1946, he saw that the Ladies Aid had become a solid unit under the careful guiding hand of Pastor C.W. Siegler who, remember, held all the offices of the Ladies Aid himself. Pastor Stuebs therefore thought it wise to place the offices of the Ladies Aid back into the hands of the women. All the Pastors who have served the congregation have provided for the spiritual well being of the members of the Ladies Aid with a devotional topic at each meeting. This is after all the purpose of every organization within the congregation, to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Ladies Aid is alive and well at St. Paul's quietly going about their work sharing their Savior with one another and the world.

There is one more committee within the Ladies Aid which I have not yet mentioned, the Flower Committee. These women serve at each of the monthly Ladies Aid meetings. They also see to it that there are flowers available for the worship services. Those flowers

in the worship service are much like the Ladies Aid. We often do not notice the flowers that are there in the church. We only notice if they are not there one Sunday. Isn't that much the way it is with the Ladies Aid? We don't notice them routinely doing the Lord's work. But imagine what would happen if for some reason they quit. Then perhaps we would appreciate the Ladies Aid. Take the time to show your appreciation for what these women are doing in your behalf. Whether they are bringing a smile to an elderly person by bringing a fruit basket or sending clothes to the other end of the world, remember what Jesus says about this work. "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt. 25:40).

Today the Ladies Aid at St. Paul's numbers around 100 members. One month they meet in the afternoon. The next month they meet in the evening. In this way many women have an opportunity to get involved in the Ladies Aid. Just as congregations need the Ladies Aid, so also the ladies in the congregation need the Ladies Aid. They need the spiritual growth which this organization offers. They need the Christian fellowship. They are getting it at Bangor under the guidance of Pastor Reginald Siegler. Since 1961, he has been carrying on the work begun by his great uncle. He has been quietly and effectively taking care of the spiritual needs of nearly 1,000 members of St. Paul's. Like the Ladies Aid much of his work is also taken for granted. But to all those who have been blessed to learn the truths of Christian doctrine from him as an infant, child, catechumen, teenager and adult, he will always hold a special place in our hearts. He brought many to know Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life.

He has been there to assure many of this truth on their death bed. Having served the Bangor congregation for 23 years, he will retire this summer from the public ministry. He will not receive the fanfare of a conquering hero, but of an obedient servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Well done good and faithful servant!"

The work of the pastors who have served the Lord's sheep at Bangor will be remembered five years from now when the congregation celebrates its centennial. The Ladies Aid will be greatly involved getting things ready for the event quietly and effectively. Will their efforts be noticed? Maybe. Maybe not. But that doesn't really matter to these women. They did not organize to receive the praise of men but of God. The history of the Ladies Aid of St. Paul's is a reflection of the history of the entire congregation. When there are problems in one area of the congregation it affects the whole congregation. All the members of the body of Christ must work together. When one member of the body hurts it affects the whole body. For 75 years the Ladies Aid has been a healthy organization within a healthy congregation. May it always be so, as not only the Ladies Aid but the entire congregation gathers together to hear the Word of our Lord.



LADIES AID - 1979

Back Row: Pastor Siegler, H. Weinke, D. Reinhardt, I. Meyer, T. Piske, E. Stello, E. Berg, I. Plenge, H. Wehrs, H. Meyer, H. Kastenschmidt, H. Langrehr, W. Sprehn, H. Zabel, W. Fox

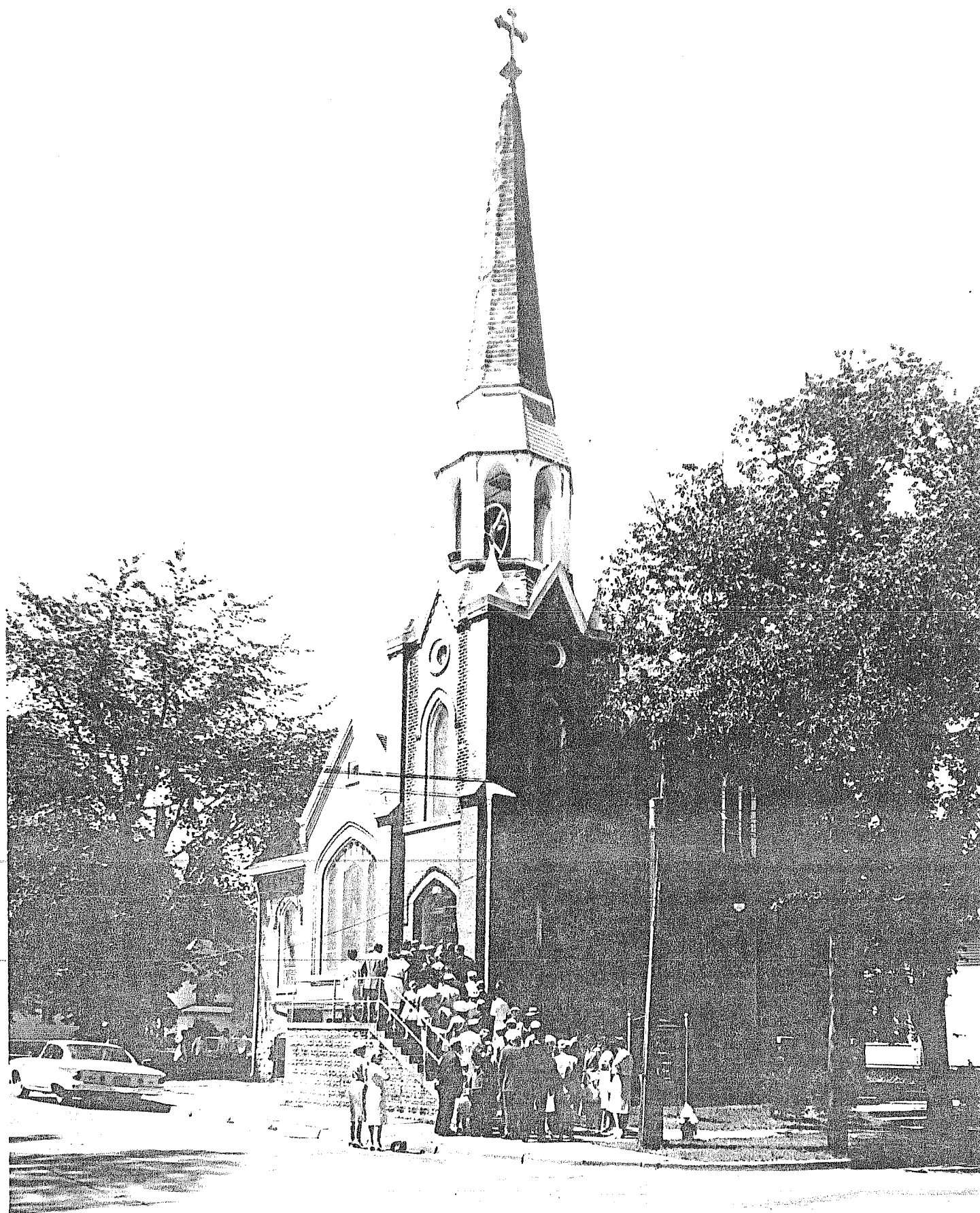
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Second Row: V. Lash, W. Gollnik, C. Kardin, F. Schoeder, N. Parmenter, V. Miller, W. Losching, A. Miller, A. Niedfeldt, W. Meyer, R. Sprehn, L. Russel, A. Schmidt, H. Piske

Front Row: H. Siegler, B. Gollnick, W. Meinking, E. Horstman, E. Jandt, E. Arentz, E. Kock, R. Tenner, W. Horstman, A. Wittmershaus, R. Schroeder, H. Miller, H. Langrehr

Absent members: A. Sprehn, R. Berg, F. Craig, G. Niedfeldt, A. Wittmershaus, C. Friske, G. Hoff, E. Horstman, C. Becker, L. Path, V. Paulus, J. Kaehler, W. Stratman, J. Havens, E. Richmond, V. Craig, D. Morris, E. Amborn, G. Kapanke, O. Berg, R. Horstman, C. Bushek, R. Manke, F. Heuer, D. Bjorkman, O. Torvick, C. Huhn, P. Peterson

God's people gather together at God's house for worship and fellowship.



ENDNOTES

1. Tauscher, James W. "A Half Century of Wheat and Tares in Bostwick Valley" p.5
2. IBID. p. 18,19
3. Siegler, C.W. "1889-1939" translation by Rev. A.R. Stuebs
4. Bangor Independent "Bangor was place of 400 in 1873"
5. IBID.
6. Siegler, C.W. "1889-1914" translation by Winfred Schroeder
7. Siegler, R.A. "1889-1979" p.7
8. IBID. p.8
9. IBID. p.9
10. IBID. p.9

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(Date Unknown)
- LA CROSSE COUNTY COUNTRYMAN "St. Paul's Lutheran To Observe 90th Anniversary"
September 20, 1979
- LA CROSSE TRIBUNE "Barre Mills Church to Mark Centennial" June 7, 1970
- Newman, Elizabeth---Personal letter on the early history of Bangor
- Siegler, Reginald "1889-1964" (75th Anniversary booklet)
- Siegler, Reginald "1889-1979" (90th Anniversary booklet)
- Siegler, C.W. "1889-1914" (25th Anniversary Booklet) translation by
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- Tauscher, James W. "A Half Century of Wheat and Tares in Bostwick Valley"(4-12-76)