

HISTORY of ST. LUKE LUTHERAN CHURCH EMERSON, NEBRASKA

St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church begins its history correctly with St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Emerson.

One of their early pastors, The Rev. Evon Nussbaum, had the foresight to realize that in time, there would be more demand for English to be used in the worship and teaching of the Church. A catechetical class was instructed and confirmed in English in the early 1900's.

In 1910 a Luther League and a Sunday School were held in English with a number of German and Swedish families taking advantage of this opportunity. Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Bettecke and Miss Ella Schopke were the first teachers of the Sunday School which met on Sunday afternoons in St. Paul's building. The first members were:

Mildred Schopke	Harry Langmack	Harry Dettleff
Laura Stark	Anna Talstrup	Leila Lamp
Rosa Talstrup	David Severson	Lorena Lamp
Fred Schopke	Gordan Severson	Elmer Jensen
Hans Wolf	Lula Bonderson	Erma Enke
Arthur Schopke	Esther Bonderson	Irene Schopke
Louis Peters	Katie Peters	Ethel Hartman
Lenora Schopke	Ernest Wolf	Frances Lamp
Anona Zastrow	Selma Zastrow	Henry Schoening
Fred Schoening		

By the summer of 1911 there was a need felt for a preaching service in English. Sunday afternoon pastors came from St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Wayne, and conducted these services. Within the congregation (then St. Paul's, Emerson) there was opposition over the use of English. The Methodist Episcopal Church on Logan Street was then empty and it was rented for \$60 a year for these services.

Pastor C. J. Ringer of St. Paul's, Wayne, suggested a new congregation be organized and on Sunday, October 22, 1911, St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church of Emerson, Nebraska was formed by these eighteen members:

Mr. & Mrs. Chas F. Bettecke	Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Enke	Mrs. Herman Stark
Mrs. Agnes Jensen	Mrs. Geo. H. Haase	Mr. Wm. Neiland
Mr. Wm. Jensen	Miss Ella Schopke	Mr. Oscar Bring
Mrs. Alfred Holt	Mrs. Kate Peters	Mr. P. A. Severson
Miss Emma Heckens	Mrs. Mendez Roe	Mr. Wm. Messerschmidt
Mrs. Henry Jensen		

The regular constitution and by-laws provided by the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Home Mission was adopted.

A Ladies Aid Society was organized on November 2, 1911 and the Luther League was organized on December 18, 1911.

The first Catechetical Class of eighteen was confirmed by the Rev. Ringer, Friday morning (Good Friday), April 5, 1911. Those confirmed were:

Lydia A. Jensen	Mildred E. Schopke	Anna E. Doxtad
Beatrice B. Blume	Laura E. Stark	Myrtle I. Heckens
Ester E. Anderson	Alice A. Anderson	Rosa A. Voss
Edwin B. Anderson	Anton N.P. Anderson	David H. Severson
J. Gordon Severson	Emil H. Lamp	Wm. H. Rohde
Luther F. Johnson	Arthur V. Bonderson	Harry Johnson

The marriage of Mr. Otto Zeisler and Miss Emily Stallbaum by The Rev. Ringer was the first wedding of the newly organized congregation on December 11, 1911. The first child baptized into the new congregation was Clarence Jens Hansen, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hansen.

The membership of the congregation continued to increase and a resident pastor was desired. The Rev. Charles H. B. Lewis of Ponca was called and became the first fulltime pastor on July 12, 1914. The family moved into rented quarters one block West of the present Church. In the fall of 1915 the present church property, Second and State Street, was purchased from Mendez Roe. The site consisted of several lots and a one-story dwelling. The Ladies Aid Society assumed the obligation of \$1800, the total cost of the property. At the time their treasury totaled \$40.10. In six months \$600 had been paid on it.

The one-story dwelling became the parsonage and was moved to the East end of the property. The old Methodist Church building was purchased for \$500 on November, 1914. In the spring of 1916 it was torn down and the materials were used in constructing a first floor of the parsonage. The one-story house was raised and while the Lewis family lived in the raised house, the new first floor was constructed underneath.

On July 9, 1916 plans were accepted for a new church building on the corner of Second and State Streets; excavation was begun July 13, and the corner stone was laid on September 10th. The Parish Hall (basement of the building) was completed in December. The first worship service was held there on Christmas Day, 1916.

The church sanctuary was completed in the spring of 1917 and was dedicated May 6th. The new church was built at a cost of \$18,000 and on the day of dedication the offering was \$5,000. The newly dedicated building was debt-free.

The membership and organizations continued to grow. In 1921 the active Church membership was 197; the Missionary Aid Society reported a membership of 50 and the Sunday School had 151 regular members with an average attendance of 143. Pastor C. H. B. Lewis submitted his resignation in 1921 and was succeeded by the Rev. Ralph Rangeler who served from 1921 to 1928.

The nave was redecorated, a new altar, altar painting, chancel stalls, and lectern were installed in 1923. The choir furnished vestments for their use. The Parish Hall was re-decorated and the parsonage improved and painted. Dr. J. F. Krueger of Midland College was the speaker for the re-dedication.

A two-week Bible School was held during the summer of 1931. This first school was attended by 65 children. Many missionary societies for children, youth, and young married ladies were organized and met regularly. During 1935, membership increased by 64 and 225 members communed at least once during the year.

In 1936, the last of Pastor Vosseler's service, the 25th anniversary was celebrated. A dinner for charter members, clergy, and council members and their wives was served. Dr. Luther M. Kuhns of Omaha gave a historical sketch of the Nebraska Synod at the dinner.

During the Rev. George Kreb's pastorate the confirmed membership was 379 with 200 communing during the year. In 1941 sixteen marriages were solemnized by the pastor.

The Rev. R. R. Pfeiffer began his pastorate in 1942 and 42 adults and youth became new members that year. The Stucco finish of the exterior was removed in 1948 and replaced by brick veneer. A wing was added to the Northeast corner to enclose the stairway. The old cornerstone was removed, its' contents reviewed and replaced in the Southwest corner of the tower. A new cornerstone was added to commemorate the remodeling and was placed in the Southeast corner. The Rev. T. J. C. Schuldt, president of the Nebraska Synod, assisted in the laying of the stones on November 27, 1949.

The remodeling of the interior of the church progressed in 1950 despite our being without a pastor. The kitchen was enlarged and remodeled, the Parish Hall floors were refinished, a new ceiling added and the hall and West classrooms painted. The parsonage was papered and painted. All these improvements totaled \$23,123.00.

In January 1951 Pastor Clarence Alexander accepted the call and that year the nave was re-decorated, the chancel enlarged, a new Baldwin electronic organ purchased, the floors were sanded, an aisle carpet laid, a sound amplifying system installed, gas heat installed and a new heater placed in the far West Sunday School room. These improvements were all completed in time for our 40th Anniversary.

At that time membership totaled 819 baptized members, 539 confirmed members and 401 communing members. During Pastor Alexander's pastorate the women organized into "Women of the Church" and reached a membership of 100. Two services were held on Sunday mornings during the summer months.

Memorial gifts added new offering plates, seven branched candelabras, credence bracket, black robes for choir, red robes for the Junior Choir and a new oak altar for the Parish Hall. The active enrollment of the Sunday School was 213 with an additional 45 on the Cradle Roll. Average attendance in Sunday school was 169 in 1956. The publication of the "Messenger," a monthly newspaper, was started to inform the congregation and families of the Sunday Church School. Helen Bonderson served as editor.

In 1961 while Pastor Stanley Sennes was with us, our Sunday School was asked to be one of 60 pilot congregations to test a new course of study. This study was being written for use in the Lutheran Church in America, the successor of the 1962 merger.

The growth of our Sunday Church School necessitated more space. During 1960 land was purchased one block West of the Church for a new parsonage. It was begun in August 1960 and completed in June 1961. The former parsonage was renovated into eight classrooms and a superintendent's office.

St. Luke was 50 years old in 1961 and prayer ceremonies celebrated that anniversary. The Rev. Paul L. Lewis, a son of Dr. Charles H. B. Lewis, our first full-time pastor, became our pastor. Pastor Paul Lewis arrived just 40 years after his father left St. Luke, Emerson. Pastor Lewis helped with the printing of our Golden Anniversary book and the various activities connected with the celebration in this Jubilee Year.

Statistics for that year were: Sunday School enrollment, 185; Women of the Church, 106; Brotherhood, 22 men; Come-Double Club, 16 couples; and the Lutheran League membership, 26 young people. The baptized membership was 713 and confirmed membership was 479. The Brotherhood continued to have their annual Steak-fries at the different homes and the Worker's Conference had their 20th Annual Chicken Supper for the Sunday School Teachers and families on the Bonderson lawn East of Town.

The Harvest Festival was started in the fall of 1962. The farmers brought in loads of corn that were auctioned off and other members gave cash to help finance the Church. Proceeds each year for five years exceeded \$3,000.00.

In 1964 the Confirmation Class gave a spot light to illumine the Gethsemane Window at night. The mortgage note of \$6,500 on the parsonage was burned. In May 1966 the Parish Hall was partially paneled, the center doors to the West were covered and the South ones made into bookcases. Extensive remodeling was undertaken in the fall of 1966 at the cost of \$3,000. A new basement stairway was built, new toilet rooms and facilities were installed, the front entrance was renovated, new cabinets and a lavatory were placed in the sacristy. The nave and narthex were carpeted.

Congregational membership in 1968 was: baptized members, 598; confirmed members, 433; active members, 360; and Sunday school enrollment, 163.

A Livestock Feeders Program was organized in 1970. The program gave to the Church \$5,192.04 in 1972 and in 1973 an offering of \$6,286.62. Part of this money was used for a new organ in 1973 and a piano in 1974.

The spring of 1972, Pastor Paul Lewis was retirement age and he resigned; Pastor Ronald Nelson accepted our call in August of 1972.

The McPherran property North of the Church was purchased in 1974 for \$5,500. The dwelling on the property was used for classrooms until September 5, 1977 when it was demolished. On December 12, 1976 the congregation voted to build a new unit to the East of the Church. In March 1978 the old parsonage was torn down; it has been used for classrooms since 1961.

Ground breaking service for the new unit was held April 9, 1978. Construction was started the following day by the general contractor, Christiansen Construction Company of Pender. Dedication service was held on November 19, 1978. The 60 x 93 structure was built for the cost of \$185,486.02. Included are four classrooms, Pastor's office, library-lounge, kitchen, rest rooms, two storerooms, large social room and vestibule. The nave of the church was re-decorated at a cost of \$500. In the spring of 1979 the Parish Hall was divided into 5 classrooms and a Sunday school office and secretary's office. The lot North of the Church was leveled and graveled to be used for parking. Pastor Nelson was called to Pueblo, Colorado in November and the Rev. Lavern Larkowski came to serve our church in June 1980.

In August 1984 Pastor Larkowski accepted a call to St. Paul's Grand Island. The roof of the Church evidenced needed repair and wood shake shingles were put on the east slope of the church roof during the fall of 1984.

A call was issued to Pastor Robert Kocher in November. Upon his acceptance the family moved into the parsonage, January 4, 1985. The service of installation was conducted by Bishop Dennis Anderson on January 27, 1985. The Kocher family had served in the overseas mission field of Malaysia. Mrs. Kocher is also the granddaughter of Dr. J. F. Krueger who was the guest speaker in 1923 for the rededication service of the renovated nave.

The number of office machines had encumbered the church office and during the summer the office was enlarged and re-located at the South end of the basement. Erwin Frey, Darrel Zeisler, Vernon Anfinson and Elmer Lamp supplied a large part of the work.

The stained glass windows needed repairs and in March 1986 they were re-cemented and various broken pieces were replaced. The Gethsemane window had one piece that required special work. The picture in the windows are of very old artistry; the picture is painted upon glass and then fired. The fine arts company claim this work is not being done any longer and an estimated value of the windows was made at \$135,000.00. A service of re-dedication was held May 25, 1986.

Submitted by Helen Bonderson
Edited by Pastor Robert Kocher