

ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Members of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church are celebrating their centennial, having been an organized congregation for one hundred years.

The history of St. Paul's began with a small group of German Lutheran pioneers who settled on farms near Emerson, Nebraska. They met for worship in various homes, the first being that of Ernest Harrigfeldt. The worshippers grew in number so they began to hold church services in a schoolhouse east of Emerson. Louis Wallwey, Augusta Ronnfeldt, and Fred Cook were the first children to be baptized here. Pastor M. Inhelter supplied this group of worshippers once a month for a two year period.

In 1883 Pastor Christian Sick, who was serving the German Lutheran Church at Ponca, was called to Emerson. They continued to worship in various schoolhouses northeast of Emerson. As the group grew in number, they began meeting in the new public school building that had just been constructed.

On August 22, 1886, under the leadership of Pastor Sick, a congregation was organized, thus St. Paul's congregation was formed.

Frederick Stolze contributed land for a building site for a new church. C. Neuhauser was the architect for the wooden structure which was dedicated in 1892. A constitution was drawn up which gave the church its name: The German Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's Congregation in Emerson and surrounding territory, Dixon and Dakota counties, Nebraska.

Some of the charter members who signed the constitution were August Schopke, Wm. Benneke, Herman Stark, Charles Zapp, Rudolph Schopke, Jr., Gottlieb Messerschmidt, Joseph Heginger, Chris Ingwersen, August Schopke, Jr., George Stallbaum, L. M. Wenzel, Louis Jopp, Henry Stahl, Jacob Jensen, Wm. Wallwey, Wm. Metz, Ernest Harrigfeldt, Ernest Enke, Chris Hingst, Ferdinand Messerschmidt, Fred Utemark, Carl Moll, Henry Brinkman, Menno Ahends, Henry Schoening, Anton Wilke, Chris Harrigfeldt, Wm. Bensen, and George Harrigfeldt. In the same year Pastor Sick concluded his ministry and was succeeded by Pastor J. F. Mueller.

In 1893 St. Paul's members rejoiced to dedicate its first house of worship in the glory of God.

Pastor E. Ashbrand was then called to serve the newly formed congregation. He terminated his services in 1894.

Pastor G. Bohnonstengel was then called to serve St. Paul's. He was the first resident pastor of the congregation. It was during this time that the constitution was revised, becoming effective August 26, 1894. Pastor Bohnonstengel concluded his services in 1896.

Pastor J. F. Mueller was again called to serve St. Paul's church, continuing his ministry here until 1902 when he was called out of this life. During his ministry here, a house was purchased. The congregation for the first time owned a parsonage. That building today is joining the church property to the north.

From 1902 to 1904 Pastor G. Rapp served the congregation. Pastor Wm. Nitzski served from 1904 to 1907.

Pastor E. Von Nussbaum was the minister from 1907 to 1909. During his pastorate the English language was introduced into the services. All services before this time were in the German language.

From 1910 to 1912 Pastor Athenstadt served the congregation. In 1910 the interior of the church was beautified with the installation of a new altar and pulpit built by Henry P. Jensen, one of the church members. In 1912 a new parsonage was constructed on the corner lot of Main and Third Street.

Pastor Theodore Traubel was called to serve St. Paul's congregation from 1912 to 1920.

Pastor A. Gilman was pastor from 1920 to 1923 followed by Pastor Wm. Koester from 1923 to 1927.

In 1927 Pastor Hugo Welchert, Sr. was called to serve the congregation. Under his guidance the Brotherhood and Missionary Aid had its start. Both of these organizations have become powerful pillars of St. Paul's congregation. During his leadership the church was redecorated and a new Hammond electric organ was installed. St. Paul's also celebrated its fiftieth anniversary during that time. In 1943 he was forced to lay aside his duties because of ill health.

In April, 1943, the congregation extended a call to Pastor Henry Rowoldt. On January 9, 1944, plans and funds for a new church building were started. At a meeting in July, 1945, a building committee was elected. Those elected were Lester Wallwey, Wm. Roeber, Fred Lange, Otto Dahms, Edward Bokemper, Walter Wilke, and Henry Jensen. The committee appointed to raise funds for the new building were

Wm. Stolze, Albert Mackling, Henry Biede, John Ruge, and Wesley Hingst. Thorwald Thorson from Forest City, Iowa, was selected as the architect. Carl Otte of Wayne, Nebraska, was chosen as the contractor for the new structure.

Some of the building materials needed were difficult to find at times because of World War II and government rationing. The former church had to be torn down for the construction of the new building so worship services were held in the Emerson City Auditorium.

On Sunday, June 30th, 1946, the corner stone was laid at a special service. In the spring of 1947 the new building was completed and dedication services were held on Sunday, April 20, 1947. Several services were held throughout the week, ending April 28th, completing the dedication.

On the first Sunday of November, 1951, Daniel Schroeder, a student at Central Seminary in Fremont, was called to supply the vacant pulpit and teach the confirmation class. Following his ordination in January of 1952, he came to Emerson to service St. Paul's. In August of 1961 the congregation observed its 75th anniversary with services on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of that month.

In 1967 Pastor Wm. Stanton came to St. Paul's. In May, 1971, a new parsonage three blocks west of the church was purchased.

The congregation observed the 90th anniversary of the church in 1976. Services were held at 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. with Pastors Hugo and Werner Welchert and Fred Heckathorne participating. Reuben Swanson, president of the Synod, delivered the sermon.

St. Paul's has sent three men into the ministry, Hugo and Werner Welchert and Fred Heckathorne. It was an honor to have them take part in the observance.

In September of 1978, Pastor Neal Von Seggern was called to serve St. Paul's. Under the guidance of Pastor Neal the centennial celebration is being planned.