

A HISTORY:  
ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
WATERTOWN, WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin

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St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church had its beginnings in the summer of 1854 when Christians in Watertown began to meet in private homes. The first pastor was Rev. Christian Sans, who had previously served Evangelical, Reformed and Lutheran congregations in the East. He had no formal theological training and did not have a strong Lutheran background. He did have a personality which drew people to him and he was successful in organizing other congregations in other parts of the country.

This budding congregation was not the only Lutheran one in the area, however, and Sans felt that if the congregation was to grow, a church building was needed. Toward that goal, the congregation was organized as the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Watertown, Jefferson County, Wisconsin in October of 1854. The first constitution was adopted in the early part of 1855 and in about a year's time, the church building was completed. That building still exists and is now called the Parish Hall and is still in use for some meetings and meals served by the Ladies Aid for various occasions.

In the beginning, the congregation was not a member of the Wisconsin Synod, mostly because Sans had connections with other bodies and would not join the Synod. As was the case with the other bodies, Sans' doctrinal stand

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was not very strong. He was a unionist, was involved in politics and advocated temperance. But he did advocate the start of a school, and one was started in the very early years. He was also instrumental in beginning other congregations in the area while traveling around to conduct services.

In the late 1850's, Sans' reputation began to lessen, and the sentiment of some of the members began to change. Rumors had begun concerning some of his past activities before he had come to Watertown. He was accused by another area pastor of being an imposter. It got as far as the courts, but was never established. Still, the item was hotly discussed by many of the citizens of the city, and even led to violence at one point. As a result of all this, he left Watertown, accepting a call to Joliet, Ill. in 1860.

That summer, the congregation called Johannes Bading. He began serving the call in September of that year. He had been sent to do mission work in the Wisconsin Synod by the Lngenberg Mission Society. In contrast to Sans, Bading was closely connected with the Synod, becoming very influential in leading the young Synod. At the first congregational meeting held after he arrived, the congregation adopted a new constitution which made the Lutheran Confessions the basis for all doctrine and practice of the congregation. Other changes were soon made which moved St. Mark's to a solid Lutheran foundation.

Bading also served as the president of the Synod at

this time, and his influence at the Synod convention the summer of 1863 moved the Synod to vote to begin a college and seminary in Watertown. The college still exists there as Northwestern College. Throughout the years, St. Mark's and Northwestern have enjoyed a very close relationship. The seminary was there only a few years, later to move to Wauwatosa, and finally to its present location in Mequon.

Shortly after Bading came, the congregation became a member of the Wisconsin Synod. Bading also began serving other congregations on a regular basis. In 1863, he was permitted a leave of absence to return to Germany to solicit funds for the Synod's new college and seminary. Pastor Moldehnke was called to fill in and to serve as the first professor of the seminary. Bading returned about fifteen months later, having collected a good deal of money for the college and seminary.

After his return, the congregation grew steadily. It built a new school and a parsonage. In 1867, the Synod broke with the liberal German State Church and the Mission Societies, and moves were made for better relations with the Missouri Synod. In 1868, Bading left St. Mark's to accept a call to Milwaukee, having firmly planting the congregation in the solid Lutheranism of the Wisconsin Synod.

After Bading left, two men served the congregation in an interim position. They were Adolph Hoenecke and Theodore Meumann of the College. Hoenecke later accepted a permanent call as the pastor, but soon asked for his

release because the Synod wanted him to remain at the college, and the combined load was too much. Reinholdt Adelberg was then called, and he accepted and served from 1869-1873. He was the first pastor to serve there who had been trained in the United States. He had been vice-president of the Eastern Synod, but joined Wisconsin when he became dissatisfied with the weak stand of the Eastern Synod. During his pastorate, the congregation continued to grow steadily. Relations with the Missouri Synod improved, and with it also grew the relationship with neighboring St. John's congregation. The two participated in some joint services and worked closely together.

The close connection with Northwestern was evident in that the faculty often helped the congregation. In fact, in 1870, Professor August Ernst was called to serve as assistant pastor. He held this position for forty-two years. Throughout the years, many other members of the faculty have also helped out the congregation.

After four years, Adelberg took a call to Milwaukee. H. B. Heinrichs was called to become the next pastor. During his short time there, the school was enlarged. But questions arose over his synodical affiliation. Some of his moral practices were also not fitting for a servant of the Word, and dislike soon arose. He was removed from office. He went to St. Louis for a while, but returned to Watertown and with his following in the congregation, he began Immanuel Lutheran Church, which became a member of the Iowa Synod. He served

that congregation, however, for only a few months.

The next pastor was Johannes Brockmann, who served from 1875 to 1904. He had been trained at the same Mission House at which Bading had been trained. Only a few years after he came, a controversy developed at St. Mark's, as well as the rest of the country, concerning Election by Grace. Discussions were held for almost a full year. Most of the members were led to the correct understanding of the doctrine, but those who didn't split and formed their own church, one which is no longer in existence.

Brockmann was very devoted to Christian mission work and helped in founding the Apache mission in Arizona. In 1903, he became sick, took a leave of absence to recover, and then returned to St. Mark's. But he soon became worse, and was given the help of an assistant, Johannes Gensicke. Shortly after that, early in 1904, Brockmann died. He had been instrumental in the founding of two choirs and the Ladies Aid. It was also during his pastorate that a new church building was erected. The old church, the original one, was only 31 years old, but by 1886 had already proved to be inadequate. The new one was constructed next to the old one, and was dedicated in September, 1888. The building still serves the congregation today, and is an excellent example of Gothic architecture.

The pastor to follow Brockmann was Julius Klingmann. He served from 1904 to 1944. Beginning with this pastor, the rest of the pastors were all trained in America. Shortly after he came, the congregation celebrated its

fiftieth anniversary. The congregation also became active in supporting the Bethesda Lutheran Home Society. The congregation also built a new parsonage, which is still in use today. They also decided to renovate and decorate the interior of the church. Up until that time, it had been undecorated. They also undertook to erect a new school building. It served the congregation well for almost sixty years. It was also during his time that the change was made from German to English. A majority of the services had been conducted in the German language, but the demand was becoming greater to use the English language. At first, those who were most interested in having English services formed their own congregation, Trinity Lutheran. Finally, in March, 1921, the congregation began using English in its Sunday worship services.

In 1928, Pastor Klingmann asked for more help, since the congregation had grown to over 2,000 souls. It became evident that the part-time assistance they had been receiving from Professor Huth was no longer enough. They decided to call a second full-time pastor, and they sent one to Pastor William Eggert. He accepted and served from 1928 to 1953. During the depression, the congregation increased in debt. Under various programs, it was paid off in October, 1943. The next January, they began a fund to redecorate the church. Only a few months later, Pastor Klingmann died. Pastor Eggert then served the congregation alone, with part-time help, until 1948.

At that time, Pastor Gerhard Redlin was installed as

the second pastor, since Pastor Eggert, suffering from a heart ailment, had requested help. In January, 1948, the congregation set up a committee to plan for the church redecoration for which they had started a fund five years before. This ended up being more of a remodeling than just a redecoration. Many changes were made in the building by the time it was finished in February, 1950. This was the first major undertaking of the congregation since it built the school in 1914. The next year, that school building was also remodeled.

On March 30, 1953, death came suddenly to Pastor Eggert from a heart attack. He was replaced by Pastor Willard Kehrberg, who served only two years. The year of 1954 was an important one for St. Marks, for they celebrated their centennial, which they celebrated for a full year. In that year, the congregation had a full-time staff of two pastors and eight teachers, two of which were provided by the sister congregation of Trinity. The congregation numbered over 2,200 souls, about 1,685 communicants and 602 voting members.

When Pastor Kehrberg took a call to Minneapolis, the congregation called James Fricke, who served from 1956 to 1962. Then on December 1, 1957, Pastor Redlin died as the result of a heart attack. During his pastorate, worship attendance had doubled, the interior of the church had been redecorated, and a new school building had been erected.

It was Pastor Harold Wicke who followed Pastor Redlin.

He began his duties in April, 1958. In 1962, Pastor Fricke accepted a call to Michigan, and was followed by Pastor Henry Paustian, who serves to the present day. When Pastor Wick accepted a call to be the editor of The Northwestern Lutheran in 1969, the call was sent out to Pastor Myron Kell, who came in October of the same year. He also continues to serve to this day.

During these last ten years, two major projects have been undertaken by the congregation. The first was another redecoration of the church and an addition to the entrance, which was completed in the spring of 1971. The next project was an addition to the school. The old portion of the school, built in 1914, had become inadequate. An addition was built onto the newer building and the old school building was torn down.

The next project, which is in progress, is the reworking of the organ, which is in need of repair. The congregation is also in the process of calling an assistant pastor, mainly to help with making the many calls a congregation the size of St. Mark's requires.

The history of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church is a long one and a blessed one. From early in its years, it has grown both in numbers and spiritually. It is a congregation which is familiar to many of the pastors in the Synod from their years at Northwestern. It has also produced many who have entered the preaching and teaching ministry. Surely the Holy Ghost has been active in the congregation, and He alone is to be praised.