

Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
Hubertus, Wisconsin

Church History 331

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Let me take you back to a time when our country was in transitional unrest. It was a time when people were wondering what happened to the ideals, morals and values of days gone by. It was a time when the nation's fathers, brothers, and sons were dying in a war that no one knew exactly why we were fighting. It was a time of uncertainty as our country embarked on the 1970's. This was a time of questions, a time of searching, but for what? For many Americans it was still and always would be the appropriate time to search out God's Word for the answers and the strength to go into an uncertain future.

For a handful of Americans the time was ripe for the message of the Gospel. As many Americans were seeking out new religions, new age movements, and new freedoms, a number of people from the area of Hubertus, Wisconsin sought to glorify God. From its start in 1969, the congregation of Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church hungered for the Word of the Lord, to be nourished by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They joined together then and continue to do so today all to the glory of God.

A Humble Beginning

Isaiah 66:2 "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

The humility and contrite spirit that Isaiah speaks of had taken hold of a handful of families around the Hubertus area. Recognizing the truth, power and authority in God's Word, this group was compelled to spread the good news throughout the world but specifically to an area just West of the Village of Hubertus.

In late 1969, a small group of believers discussed the idea of starting a church in the Hubertus area. The group was guided by Pastor Ralph Martens of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sussex, Wisconsin. Pastor Martens wrote letters to the twelve known families in the

area, that were members in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, inquiring their interest to start a mission church in the Hubertus area. To obtain an idea of mission potential, that is, the desire to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the unchurched members in the Hubertus-Richfield area, the South Eastern Mission Board of the WELS authorized Martens to call a meeting.¹ The first meeting was on December 1, 1969 at the Alfred Pike home. Five families were present, four WELS and one taking adult instruction. Three WELS families could not be present as well as reports of other interested families. The group requested permission for exploratory services to begin.² Pastor Martens was called to serve this group while still serving his congregation in Sussex.

A second meeting was held on Jan 20, 1970 again at the Pike residence with six families in attendance. The previous summer, the District Mission Board conducted a general survey of the area finding an existing population of 4,200 with encouraging reports of future growth. Of the people surveyed, one out of three claimed to have Lutheran or church membership.³ So on January 31, 1970 students and wives from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, numbering eleven, completed the community canvas of the Hubertus area.⁴

The Lord blessed the efforts of the canvas. With support from the South Eastern Mission Board of the WELS, on the first of February 1970, the first church service was held in the Friess Lake Fire hall. Pastor Martens held services every Sunday at 9:15 am with Sunday school at 10:15.⁵ At their first service fifty-six people joined to worship with nineteen children in Sunday

¹ Letter dated Nov. 21, 1969 from Pastor Ralph Martens of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church addressed to different families in the Hubertus area.

² Letter from Pastor Martens to the S.E. Wisconsin District Mission Board

³ Letter dated Nov. 21, 1969 from Pastor Martens addressed to different families in the Hubertus area.

⁴ Official Church records, Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hubertus Wisconsin.

⁵ Michalowski, Alice, *Friess Lake Reporter*, February 1970.

school. Council and committee meetings were held in the homes of church members, as was Bible class and choir practice. Services continued at the fire hall until November 24, 1974.⁶

In June of 1970, Pastor Martens accepted a call to be a missionary to Puerto Rico and was replaced by Pastor John Raabe of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Mission Board. On August 23, 1970 the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Mission of Hubertus, Wisconsin requested mission status.⁷ On the tenth of November of that same year Crown of Life was officially organized and granted mission status. As a mission congregation Crown of Life received financial support from the WELS which would soon enable them to call their first fulltime pastor.⁸ On December first of the same year, Crown of Life adopted its first constitution. The following day, Pastor Martens wrote to officially recognize the transfer of membership from Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sussex to form the new Wisconsin Mission in Hubertus, Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁹ On February 14, 1971 the congregation requested membership into the WELS in the South Eastern Wisconsin District. During the WELS Synodical Convention in August of 1971, Crown of Life was received into membership.¹⁰

Time to build

With a constitution and mission mind to spread the Gospel to the world and to their neighbors, Crown of Life was in need of a permanent residence.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

The members of Crown of Life left the building of their church and the spreading of the Gospel up to the Holy Spirit. They trusted that through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit

⁶ Official Church records, Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Hubertus Wisconsin.

⁷ Letter dated Aug. 23, 1970 from the Wisconsin Lutheran Mission Hubertus, WI to the S.E. Wisconsin District Mission Board.

⁸ Letter dated Nov. 5, 1970 from WELS S.E. Wisconsin District to Pastor John Raabe.

⁹ Letter dated Dec. 2, 1970 from Faith Ev. Lutheran Church to Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Hubertus WI.

¹⁰ Letter from the WELS, Office of the Secretary to Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Hubertus, WI.

would create and strengthen faith in His people and as a fruit of faith would come the members and students to fill a church and school and also the gifts to glorify God.

Under the direction of Pastor Raabe, Crown of Life started planning for their new home. On August 18, 1971 the present site of the church and school at 1282 Tally Ho Trail, Hubertus Wisconsin, was purchased for \$10, 500.¹¹ Synod architect Duane Anderson was hired to draw up the preliminary plans for the land on the corner of Hubertus Road and Tally Ho Trail.¹²

On July 16, 1973 the WELS purchased a temporary parsonage for Crown of Life at 1450 Mount Lane, Hubertus for \$35,000 for occupancy until a new parsonage was built. In September of 1973, Herbert Yeager and Associates won the contract to build the new church for Crown of Life. They did the basic construction work but the new church of Crown of Life was a labor of love for its members. In late October of 1973 Harrison Duffy, a member of Crown of Life arranged for excavation to be done at the property for no cost. After basic construction, the members and friends from the community pitched in to do the finishing work that included; painting, staining, carpeting, light fixtures, colored glass windows, parking lot landscape, among many other jobs.¹³

Just one week before the dedication service Crown of Life found itself pewless. With no available funds, members raised money to purchase and install pews that they had found on sale from a Greek Orthodox Church in Milwaukee. After installation of the pews Crown of Life was ready to dedicate their new property. The new church was dedicated to the glory of God on December 1, 1974. Pastor John Raabe, along with Pastor Paul Pankow, who was installed as permanent pastor of Crown of Life in August of 1973, and Pastor Kurt Koeplin, who served Atonement in Milwaukee and was a member of the South Eastern Mission Board, were present

¹¹ Letter from Crown of Life Ev. Lutheran Church to S.E. Wisconsin Mission Board.

¹² WELS form BC-1, Building cost breakdown for Crown of Life Ev. Lutheran Church.

and helped with the dedication service. Together with the regular Sunday morning service and the dedication service in the evening almost 500 people celebrated the work of the Lord. Pastor Pankow wrote, "In dedicating our first house of worship today, we humbly express our gratitude to our gracious Lord for all that He has done for us. And for all this we cannot but say as did Jacob of old: 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant'." ¹⁴

A month earlier construction had begun on the new parsonage directly across from the new church. The cost for the new parsonage was \$38,000. It too was dedicated to the glory of God on June 8, 1975 and work was completed in August. Assistance in financing for both building projects was granted through the Church Extension Fund of the WELS. ¹⁵

For those families interested in Christian Day School for their children, Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hartford, Wisconsin provided elementary school with financial assistance available for tuition from Crown of Life. ¹⁶ On January 18, 1977 the congregation voted to become self-supporting. At that time twenty children of the congregation were attending Christian Day School at neighboring congregations. ¹⁷ Using the basement of the church facility, Christian Day School began at Crown of Life on August 28, 1978 with thirty children enrolled. As enrollment increased so did the need for additional room. So, on July 13, 1980 ground was broke for a new two-room school addition. With all glory given to God the new addition was dedicated on January 18, 1981. ¹⁸

¹³ Letter dated Aug. 10, 1973 from Crown of Life to General Board for Home Missions

¹⁴ Bulletin for the dedication of the new church, December 1, 1974.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Voter's meeting minutes, Jan. 18, 1977.

¹⁸ Bulletin for the dedication of the new edition, Jan. 18, 1981.

Continuing to glorify their God for all he had done, the members of Crown of Life had given gifts to the Lord to retire the debt on the church building.¹⁹ On January 28, 1996 the church officers along with Pastor Schneidervin burned the mortgage following the Sunday morning service.

Later in 1996 the congregation took out a ten year Property Improvement Loan from Aid Association for Lutherans for \$50,000. The funds were used for much needed repairs and improvements to both the church and parsonage. The church received roofing repairs along with new carpeting. The parking lot was paved and new windows along with a new kitchen floor were installed in the parsonage. Again, giving glory to God, the members through their offerings paid off the loan seven and one half years early.²⁰

The Lord had blessed the gifts and the work of Crown of Life and once again the congregation felt the need to expand the school and church facility. In 1998 an Expansion Study Committee was formed. The committee considered the task of enlarging the school by two or three rooms, adding a gymnasium and extending the narthex of the church. The committee met with the contracting firm of Anderson-Ashton and also held numerous open forums with the congregation. At its quarterly meeting on October 27, 1998 the report from the contractor as well as the recommendation from the congregation was set before the voters.²¹

At the meeting, the Board of Elders recommended to the Church Council and voters that the congregation should employ the services of the WELS Parish Assistance Program. The voters approved the recommendation on January 26, 1999.²² The congregation went on to look at the various ways of funding the new building project. Pastor Schneidervin and Chris

¹⁹ Letter dated Jan 5, 1996 from WELS Church Extension Fund to Rev. Schneidervin, Crown of Life.

²⁰ Official records, Crown of Life Lutheran Church, 1282 Tally Ho Trail, Hubertus, Wisconsin.

²¹ Quarterly voters meeting minutes, Oct. 27, 1998.

²² Voters meeting minutes, Jan. 26, 1999.

Schneidervin designed a special offering program entitled, "Forward By Faith." A team of callers for the program was assembled and trained, making visits to Crown of Life families between September and October of 1999. On the 24th of October of that year a special "Gift and Commitment" Sunday service was conducted. At which, the congregation gave \$120,000 plus an additional \$129,000 in three year pledges.²³

At the 2000 annual voters meeting in January, the voters approved the proposal for building two additional classrooms and new gymnasium. The Expansion Committee was charged with hiring the labor and decided on Excel Engineering for the architecture and C.D. Smith as the general contractor. In April of the same year financing for the structure was arranged through First Star Bank.²⁴ So after the building plans were approved by the Town of Richfield the groundbreaking service took place on July 23, 2000 under the theme, "Forward By Faith."²⁵ Construction began on October 22 later that year.

In March of 2001 the members of Crown of Life once again took up their labor of love to help finish the new facility by painting, wiring and installing the fire alarm system and cleaning up. A special Arbor Day was held on June 9, to landscape the grounds, paint the outside of the church and fill the new classrooms. Opening the service with the hymn "To God Be The Glory" Crown of Life dedicated the new education and fellowship facility on September 23, 2001.²⁶

Service in the Lord

Ephesians 4:11-12 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

²³ Official records, Crown of Life.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bulletin for the groundbreaking service on July 23, 2000.

²⁶ Bulletin for the dedication of the new education and fellowship facility, Sept. 23, 2001.

To the glory of God so that the body of Christ be built up Crown of Life has called pastors, teachers, and principles to promote and encourage the spread of the Gospel and to nurture her members in the Holy Scriptures.

Pastors

Ralph Marten - From its start, Crown of Life called neighboring pastor Ralph Martens of Faith Lutheran in Sussex, Wisconsin. While serving Faith Lutheran, Pastor Martens also organized the exploratory canvassing as well as the Sunday services for Crown of Life until June of 1970 when he accepted a call to Puerto Rico. Pastor Martens is also credited with the idea for the name of the new church.²⁷

John Rabbe - Without a pastor serving the congregation, Pastor Raabe of the Synod Mission Board filled the vacancy starting in August of 1970. Under the leadership of Pastor Raabe, Crown of Life was officially organized and incorporated. He continued to serve the church until August of 1973.²⁸

Paul Pankow - Pastor Pankow was called as the first resident pastor of Crown of Life on June 5, 1973. He was installed on August 5, 1973.²⁹ While waiting for the new parsonage to be built the Pankow's lived at 1450 Mount Lane, Hubertus. While serving Crown of Life Pastor Pankow celebrated his 25th Anniversary in the ministry with a special service in his honor on October 28, 1984. Pastor Pankow served Crown of Life Lutheran Church until April 21, 1985 after he accepted a call to Portage, Wisconsin.³⁰

²⁷ Official Church records, Crown of Life.

²⁸ Letter from Pastor Raabe, Crown of Life Lutheran Church to registered worshipers and prospects.

²⁹ Bulletin insert for the 25th Anniversary of Crown of Life Lutheran Church, 1995.

³⁰ Official Church records, Crown of Life.

Wayne Mueller - Pastor Mueller, professor from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was asked to serve as the vacancy pastor from April 22, 1985 to June 15, 1985.³¹

John C. Schneidervin - On June 23, 1985 Pastor Schneidervin was installed at Crown of Life.

Pastor Schneidervin served as both pastor and interim principle for the 1998/99 school year. With a decline in student enrollment, Pastor Schneidervin and the Board of Education began a program to instill in families at Crown of Life the importance of Christian education. Pastor Schneidervin has had the privilege to celebrate with the members of Crown of Life their 25th Anniversary as a church, the church debt repayment, and a new edition to the church and school. Pastor Schneidervin presently serves as the second resident pastor called to Crown of Life.³²

Future Pastors

In 1996 the congregation voted to take advantage of the Senior Vicar Program from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Each year seniors from the seminary would be asked to preach at least once a month as well as help with communion. The senior vicars from 1996 to date are; Michael Helwig, Daniel Heiderick, Matthew Kuske, Anthony Fix, William Ritchie, and Christian Christenson.³³

Teachers

Mark Hinds - Mr. Hinds was installed on July 9, 1978 as principle of the new Crown of Life Day School.

Margaret Hinds - Mrs. Hinds was installed on August 23, 1981 as the new Kindergarten teacher.

Mr. and Mrs. Hinds served Crown of Life until they resigned their calls on April 26, 1993.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Bethel Kock - Miss Kock was installed as the first teacher of primary grades. She served until June of 1981.

Linda Kasten - Miss Kasten was installed on August 23, 1981 as the new teacher of primary grades. She served until June of 1985.

Lisa Jeske - Miss Jeske was installed on July 10, 1983 as the new teacher of primary grades. She served until June of 1985.

Jean Christensen - Miss Christensen was installed on June 20, 1986 as the new teacher of primary grades. She served until July of 1988.

Gwen KammueLLer - Miss KammueLLer was extended a one-year call to serve as the new teacher for primary grades. She served until July of 1989.

Sharon Becker - Miss Becker was installed on July 30, 1989 as the new teacher of primary grades. After becoming Mrs. John Schmidt, she resigned her call June 1, 1997 before her first child was born. On January 28, 2001, Mrs. Schmidt was installed as the director of music for Crown of Life.

Mark Kahrs - Mr. Kahrs was assigned from Dr. Martin Luther College as the new principle and upper grades teacher. He was installed on July 25, 1993. He served the congregation until June of 1998 when he accepted a call to be principle in Kewaskum, Wisconsin.

Nancy Ebeling - Mrs. Ebeling was installed on August 28, 1994 as the new Kindergarten teacher. She presently serves the congregation in the same position.

Becky Wierschem - In the fall of 1995 Crown of Life began a new K4 program and hired Mrs. Wierschem to work with the congregation's four year olds. She served until June of 1999.

³³ Ibid.

Melanie Schoeneck - Mrs. Schoeneck was assigned from Martin Luther College to serve as the new teacher of primary grades. She was installed on August 3, 1997. She served until December 24, 1998.

Jennifer Kuske - Mrs. Kuske was extended a one-year call at Crown of Life. She was installed on August 30, 1998. After the resignation of Mrs. Schoeneck, Mrs. Kuske assumed the responsibility of all eight children in the school at that time. She served until June of 1999.

Susan Mueller - Mrs. Mueller was installed on July 23, 2000 as the new teacher for grades 1-4. She is currently serving Crown of Life in that position.

Wade R. Cohoon II - Mr. Cohoon was installed as principle and teacher of all eight grades on July 18, 1999. He presently serves as principle and teacher of grades 5-8.

Ginger Bonow - Mrs. Bonow was hired in the summer of 1999 to teach the K4 program. On October 31, 1999 the congregation extended an official call to Mrs. Bonow to teach the K4 program and begin planning for a K3 program. She presently teaches the K3 and K4 programs at Crown of Life.³⁴

Family of Believers

Ephesians 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

God has made a promise to the world that his word will always be effective. It will not return to him empty. The work of the Holy Spirit is not always visible. Sometimes results may not be seen for a generation or more. For the last thirty-two years the work of the Holy Spirit has

been visible at Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church. Believers from infants to the elderly are the glory of God. The Holy Spirit has left a mark or seal on the souls of those he has brought to faith through the washing of rebirth in Holy Baptism. This mark of baptism is a seal or a promise that God will be glorified in His people and they will enjoy His eternal glory in heaven. God has been glorified. His name has been praised through the work of the Holy Spirit at Crown of Life.

Starting with only six families at its second meeting in January of 1970 the Lord blessed the efforts of Crown of Life. According to the 1970 yearbook, the congregation grew in one year to sixteen families with thirty-two communicants and sixty-one total souls.³⁵ On the day of the new church's dedication in December of 1974 the number of souls had grown to one hundred and seventy with one hundred communicants. Fifty-five children were enrolled in Sunday school and eleven children attended Christian Day School at Peace Lutheran Church in Hartford, Wisconsin. Pastor Pankow wrote in the bulletin for the day of dedication, "The future of the church is now commended to the continued prayers and support of the members and friends of Crown of Life Lutheran Church. And, especially, may our gracious God hold His protecting hand over His flock in the future as He has so evidently done in the past."³⁶

The Lord continued to watch over His flock at Crown of Life. In January of 1975 the congregation voted to implement youth programs as well as Pioneers for girls and boys. Christian education of the youth was a top priority so the congregation entered into the Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School Federation in April of 1975. In October of the same year, the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Crown of Life Lutheran Church Yearbook, 1970.

³⁶ Bulletin for the dedication of Crown of Life's new church building, Dec. 1, 1974.

congregation also joined in Wisconsin Institutional Ministry. By the end of 1975 Crown of Life had grown to two hundred and thirty-six souls with one hundred and forty-four communicants.³⁷

In January of 1977, with twenty children attending Christian Day School at neighboring congregations, the congregation voted to become self-sufficient. In August of 1978 the school opened with thirty children enrolled. In 1979 the enrollment rose to forty. Giving all glory to God for his guidance, Crown of Life celebrated its 10th Anniversary as a church on November 7, 1980. In January of 1981, the new school addition was dedicated with fifty-nine students enrolled in school. Not taking the gift of children or their education for granted, the congregation started the "PEACE" program that stands for "Parents Encouraging A Christian Education." The program began in 1993 along with a growing concern for the youth and teen programs spurred on by Mr. and Mrs. Mark Kahrs.³⁸

Crown of Life celebrated their 25th Anniversary with new paraments purchased by the gifts of members. In their 25th year, Crown of Life took on greater challenges to nurture the flock and to reach out into the community. To accomplish their goals the congregation began the following committees; Community Outreach Projects, New Member Assimilation, Athletic Coordinator, Social Activities, Member Care, Publicity, and Recruitment.³⁹ The congregation also came together to pay off the mortgage on the church loan to end the 25th year Anniversary in December.

In October of 1997 the congregation approved a new constitution to better serve their growing church. In April of that year gifts were received to purchase the present standing candelabras at the altar of the church. The organ of the church was in poor condition so in 1998, through gifts from the members, the congregation purchased and installed an electronic piano as

³⁷ Official church records, Crown of Life.

³⁸ Ibid.

well as the amplifier and speakers.⁴⁰ To promote learning and to give the school some local exposure, the congregation installed weathernet equipment on the roof of the church. In connection with WITI-TV6, Crown of Life Day School would be mentioned on the air during the weather broadcasts. The weathernet equipment is still in use and can be viewed on Fox 6 news.⁴¹

In August of 1999, sixteen students were enrolled in the school. Presently, the enrollment is forty-five with twenty-nine in kindergarten through eighth grade plus fifteen in the preschool. To the glory of God, Crown of Life has grown from five families in their first meeting in December of 1969 to 242 communicants and 317 souls.⁴²

Again, let me take you to time when our country is at transitional unrest. It is a time of uncertainty as our nation fights a war thousands of miles from home. It is a time when people are questioning the loss of ideals, morals, and values of days gone by. It is a time when people are wondering, seeking, and searching, but for what? Things really haven't changed all that much for our country in the past thirty-two years. Things haven't changed at Crown of Life. As many Americans continue to search for a meaning in life, the members of Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church are still giving glory to God. The same fire to spread the Gospel throughout the world and to their neighbors still burns strong among this growing congregation. It is this growth in the Gospel through the Holy Spirit that keeps Crown of Life focused on reaching out to the community. It is this growth in the Gospel that encourages them to care for their own, to nurture the souls who have entered the church doors and sat in the desks for thirty-two years.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Official church records, Crown of Life.

The fact that the members of Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church are still meeting today is a credit to the pastors, teachers, and church leaders who insisted that the Word of God in Law and Gospel be preached and taught in the church and school. It is a credit to the members who required nothing less than to hear the sweet sound of the Gospel proclaimed as their source of life and their motivation to serve the Lord. And without a doubt, as it has been for the past thirty-two years, Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hubertus Wisconsin, stands firm today on the Word of God with all credit and all glory going to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and honor and power.

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the *crown of life.*” Revelation 2:10

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