



Pastor Muenkel:  
A Brief History of a servant of Christ Lutheran Zumbrota

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*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."*(1 Cor. 3:6). God who makes all the plants of the field grow, also makes his church grow. The church at Christ Lutheran Zumbrota is no exception. Through the work of those whom God has called the church has been blessed. Those harvesters have preached his word and used the sacraments by the grace of God. Over the years a person can see the growth of the church. The growing church was visible during the time that Pastor Muenkel served. Through the grace of God the ministry had expanded through out reach and with the start of a school. God had clearly blessed the work of his servant. Like a plant under God's guidance it will continue to grow. This paper is just a little history of when Pastor Muenkel served at Christ Lutheran.

### **A Brief History of the Person Pastor Muenkel and his Family**

Pastor Herbert Muenkel was born in Caledonia MN. He went through schooling the way most of our pastors, by attending Northwestern College and then on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He graduated from the Seminary in 1939. He would marry his wife Myrtle the same year he graduated. His call would take him back to MN serving Trinity Lutheran Church near Austin. Myrtle was described as a faithful pastor's wife to her husband as well as to the church and her Lord. They had two daughters, Gwen and Jennifer. They both were talented with music. Gwen went on to be a music professor at DMLC for a number of years. As a father and a husband Pastor Muenkel was viewed as loving and caring.<sup>1</sup>

Pastor was described as a very straightforward person. He was dedicated to his work. He was very strict and faithful with everything he did but yet relaxed at times with his family and friends. He dressed very professional always being seen in a tie.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Stiller, personal interview, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004

However, he did shock the congregation by wearing a T-shirt and jeans to an out door service and then joined in a softball game afterwards. A close friend of his said, "He did everything in a hurry. When he walked, he walked fast. When he drove, he drove fast."<sup>2</sup> He knew that Pastor Muenkel drove fast because of his speeding tickets. In his fifties he stated having health problems. However he did have his share of weaknesses too. His health started to deteriorate when he had heart problems and was on heart medication for the rest of his life, but that never got in the way of his work.

His favorite hobby was to go hunting. He liked to squirrel hunt often and would dress up in all his hunting clothes. Many people laughed when they saw him dressed for this occasion. His favorite trophy was a black squirrel that he even had stuffed. This animal is very rare and hard to find so he was very proud of it. One of his close acquaintances was Professor Albrecht from DMLC. Pastor even had a collection of pictures of Albrecht and himself spending time together even sharing a beverage or two.<sup>3</sup>

As a pastor Muenkel was very firm and a determined man. There was great respect for him in the congregation. He showed care for his people. There would be times where he would even ride with the person to the hospital to make sure that they were ok. He would drive kids to school that were attending the Christian day school in Goodhue.<sup>4</sup>

In the pulpit he had a good presence. He had a good preaching voice and it was heard through out the church even without a microphone. His sermon had some fire and brimstone in it but always brought them back with the gospel. His presence in the classroom was very firm. He was respected and had authority when he taught. He was

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barb Johnson, phone interview, December 12th

very strict with the confirmation children. The kids didn't mess around in his class.

"Everyone had to recite the catechism in front of the class. He really made us know our stuff."<sup>5</sup> He was described as a knowledgeable preacher and teacher.

### **A Brief History of Christ Lutheran Zumbrota**

Around 1890 German-speaking Lutherans who settled in the Goodhue County shared the services of a pastor with community of Popular Grove. Sunday afternoon services were held in a couple of homes in Zumbrota. When the Pastor of Popular Grove left the pastor of Grace and St. John's took over.

The Tiny flock held its organizational meeting on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1896 under Pastor Hinderer's supervision. They adopted a constitution based upon the unaltered Augsburg Confession and chose the name: *Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Goodhue County, Minnesota*. One of the first resolutions on record provided a three month school and a hired teacher to provide religious instruction for children.<sup>6</sup>

The group discussed and approved plans to construct a church. The first confirmation was a private one with eight confirmed on August 1897. A little over a year later they dedicated their first church building located on South Main Street. The total cost of the project amounted somewhere between \$1600-\$2000. The church records also indicated that the Ladies Aid contributed a number of things for the church.<sup>7</sup>

In 1902 the church inquired about having English services and permission was granted to the pastor to hold as many as necessary. An English service was held in the evening once a month. Electric lights were installed into the church a year later. In 1907 Christ Lutheran became a dual parish with St. John's Minneloa. In 1908 Sunday school was organized in the church. The pastor taught about 15 children in the German

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "A Century of Grace with Christ." (Church yearbook 1996): 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 2

language. They continued with the once a month English services and in 1914 was the first time someone was confirmed in English. Soon a resolution came to have English and German services on alternate Sundays. September of 1920 a group of young people met at a member's home to start a youth group. The group chose "*Luther League*" for its name and it is still goes by that name today.<sup>8</sup>

Some changes happen in the 1920's as well. In January the members of Zumbrota and Minneloa held a meeting and decided to dissolve the dual parish. The next month the congregation decided to join the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. Christ Lutheran incorporated under the name: "*Evangelical Lutheran Christ Congregation of Zumbrota in Goodhue County, Minnesota.*" Four years later the congregation decided to make plans for building a new church right next to the parsonage on East Ave. It was contracted for under \$20,000 and the stain-glass windows were furnished by donations from the Ladies Aid, Luther League, and the Sunday school. The first service was held in January 1925 and was done in the German language. However, in 1936 the congregation increased the number of English services. German services were conducted in the second and fifth Sunday of each month, as were the services on all the second holidays. That same year the Church published the first issue of the parish newsletter called "*The Parish Messenger.*"<sup>9</sup> The Luther League voted to provide for all expenses and has continued this project up to the present time.

#### **Pastor Herbert F. Muenkel: Zumbrota's Fifth Pastor (1950-1983)**

Pastor Muenkel of Trinity Lutheran was called to Zumbrota and was installed December 5, 1950. It was a little rural congregation in a town with about 1500 people.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 3

Most of the people he served would have been farmers. A few people have claimed that they were baptized, confirmed, and married by Pastor Muenkel at Christ Lutheran. He served for 33 years, the longest in the history of Zumbrota.

Not only a pastor to the congregation but also serve as a supervising pastor to many vicars during his ministry. Jerome Enderle served as the congregation's first vicar in August 1971. Other vicars who served during Pastor Muenkel include: Wayne Rouse, Thomas Zahn, Daniel Nitz, Rick Curia, George Pavia, Stephen Casai, Martin Bauer, Mark Barenz, Larry Pontel, and Kenneth Nelson.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Church during his Ministry**

It was changing times in our synod when Pastor Muenkel accepted his call. Therefore the worship service was also changing during his time serving in Zumbrota. When he came to Zumbrota the church would have two services on Sunday morning. The congregation went to more English services, only having four German communion services per year. Later in 1963 all German services were discontinued. The Children's Christmas Eve service was also change because the church was too small to hold all the people attending. They moved the service over to the Zumbrota High school so that there was enough room for seating everyone. The services were held at the High School until 2004.<sup>11</sup>

There were many church groups formed during his ministry, so that people can enjoy Christian fellowship with one another. A group of ladies organized the sowing circle in 1960. These women would make quilts and blankets for the African Missions, clothing for the Apache Indians. They made afghans for the shut-in members and sewed

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 15

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 6

many quilts for needy families. They would also make a quilt for the new called workers. The first Father-Son banquet and the Mother-Daughter banquet were both held in the year 1962. These two banquets would become yearly traditions about six months apart from each other. The "*Couples Club*" was also organized the same year. Also around this time the Ladies Aid joined the Lutheran Women's Mission Society and the Luther League joined the Zumowatha Lutheran Youth League with the neighboring sister congregations.<sup>12</sup>

The congregation observed some special services during Muenkel's term. They celebrated Pastor's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ministry and marriage on October 11, 1964. June 20, 1971 Christ Lutheran celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and had Benjamin Borgshatz as the guest speaker. The congregation also recognized Pastor Muenkel's 25 years of service to Christ Lutheran in December 1975. Two years later they celebrated 40 years of his service in the ministry.<sup>13</sup>

### **Outreach and expansion at Christ Lutheran**

One new way to reach out to people was through the radio. In 1962, that is what the church did. Pastor Muenkel with the area pastors broadcasted a service on the radio called "*The Lutheran Chapel of the Air.*" A short service would be recorded and played on channel KCUE Red Wing. There would be an opening hymn, the Apostles' Creed, a sermon, the Lord's Prayer, and a closing hymn. It would be a half an hour time slot on Sunday morning at 9:00am. The text would follow along with the church year. They would meet in the basement at Christ Lutheran in order to record these services, and there are currently still meeting at the same place.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 7

Another priority for Pastor Muenkel was a Christian day school. Within his first year the Church took a poll of the congregation's leaders regarding a school. There were 80 ballots returned 60 were against it and 20 were for it. The 75% that were against it made Pastor somewhat cautious in going about the school plans. He didn't want the church to be divided over this issue.<sup>14</sup>

With a Sunday school enrollment of 183 the church needed more rooms to teach this many. In 1957 the voters decided to construct an educational building for the Sunday school. They received pledges to meet the goal of \$120,000. It was a building that would have two offices, a library, four classrooms, a kitchen, and an auditorium. They ground breaking work began in 1959 and the project would be finished within the same year. The building was dedicated at a special service in the park July 17, 1959, with Synod president Oscar Naumann as the guest speaker.<sup>15</sup>

With the an educational building that fits the needs for the Sunday school and having a good size building to start a day school, the congregation was still split in its decision. Many people in the church thought that that they were not capable financially to support a school. Some thought that Sunday school was enough. However there were some families that believed that Pastor was to cautious and to slow bringing a Christian Day school to Zumbrota. Some of these families transferred over to Grace Goodhue to send their children to St. John's Lutheran school.<sup>16</sup>

A few families leaving the church because of no Christian day school, the push for one became greater. There was a special voters meeting held in April of 1977. There were many heated arguments for one way or another. Pastor Muenkel was there to keep

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Stiller, personal interview, December 5th

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



everyone calm, and was very careful how he stated his words that night. His view was that this is the time to start a school. The members voted and it was 55 to 47 a close vote yet it was passed to start the school. With a close vote such as this it is hard to keep the members united. A few were upset with the decision and didn't support the school initially. However Pastor Muenkel believed that this church was heading in the right direction. "Many prayers have been answered after many years, that our children can get the word of God every day."<sup>17</sup>

The school's first teacher was Miss Dawn Skovsted assigned from DMLC. That year there were 24 students in grades Kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The next year they added a principal who taught 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The school that year had 31 students, a number that represented 31% of the people sending their children to the school. Those who were not in favor of the school only saw the bad statistics. What may have seemed to be unsuccessful did not see what was going on. "God's word was taught daily to our young ones."<sup>18</sup> The school has grown since and has added more teachers. In 1987 pastor Muenkel preached at the 10-year anniversary of the school. Preaching the message that by God's grace the church and school have grown. Today the school has four teachers on the faculty and, plus some help for the daycare. Now about 80% of the congregation sends their children to the day school.<sup>19</sup> The classrooms are filled and it is outgrowing the education building that they have. His church indeed is expanding.

On July 3, 1983 Pastor Muenkel preached his last sermon as a shepherd to Christ Lutheran. After a long and faithful ministry he retired. For forty-four years he served the Lord, thirty-three at Christ Lutheran Zumbrota. One could look at all that has

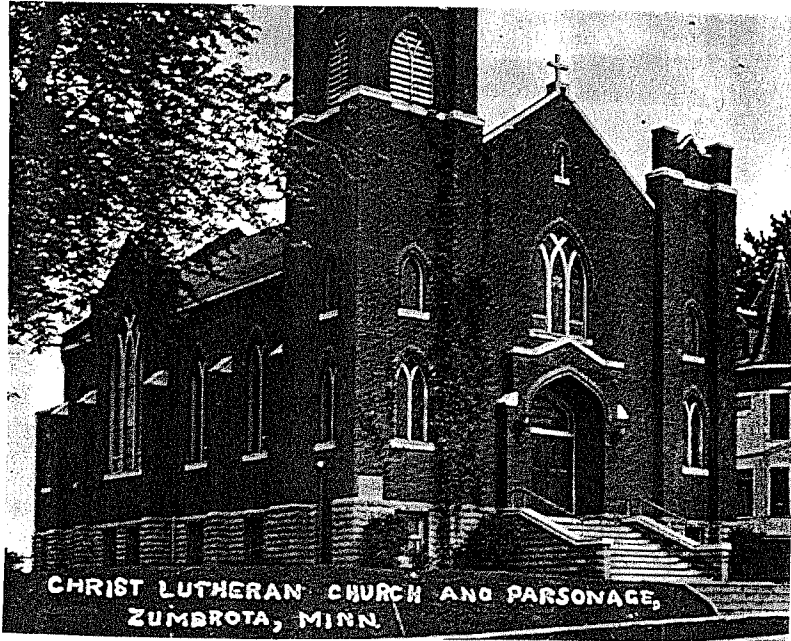
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<sup>17</sup> "A Century of Grace with Christ," (Church yearbook 1996): 10

<sup>18</sup> Gary Stiller, personal interview, December 5th

<sup>19</sup> "A Century of Grace with Christ," (Church yearbook 1996):11

been done during his time spent there and say it was a productive ministry. Pastor Muenkel wouldn't tell you that himself but give the glory to God. He is the source and the only one that can make a church grow.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> church on East Ave.



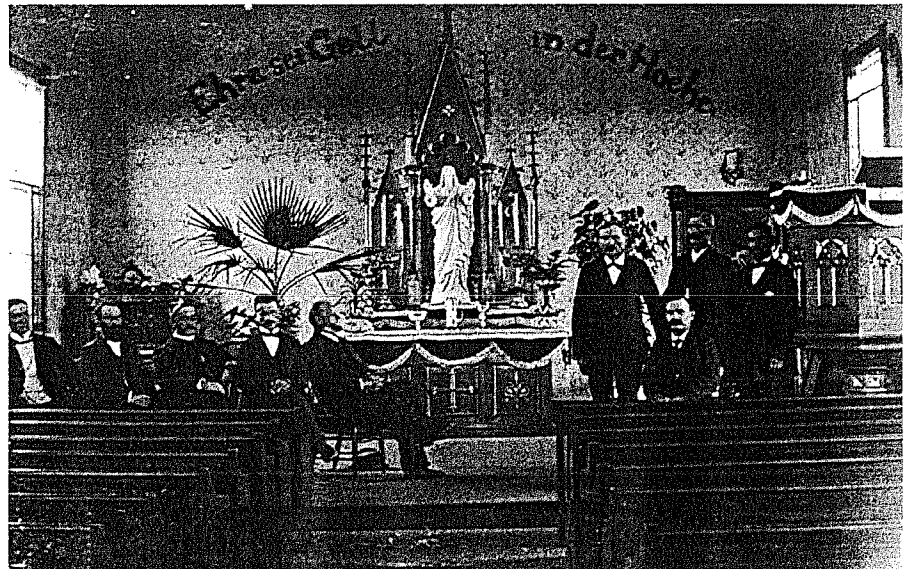
Kirche der Christus-Gemeinde zu Zumbrota, Goodhue Co., Minn.

The First Church

**Dedication Day of  
First Church  
July 10, 1898**

Synod Congregation President,  
Rev. Linnevold  
Rev. Lahme  
Prof. F. Schaller  
Rev. Hinderer  
Rev. Bender  
Henry Hinz  
Edward Lueck  
Theodore Stecher  
Richard Zetzmann  
George Heitmann

Located on South Main Street  
Dedicated July 10, 1898



## Bibliography

*A Century of Grace With Christ: 1896-1996*, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
Zumbrota MN: 1996

Stiller, Gary. Personal interview, December 5<sup>th</sup>

Johnson, Barb. Phone interview, December 12<sup>th</sup>