

A Brief History of Fairview Evangelical Lutheran Church

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The year was 1923. The Great War, supposedly the war to end all wars, had been over for just over 4 years. America was just beginning its rise to become the superpower country of the world. The period known as the Roaring 20's was just getting full swing. A decade of prosperity and wealth was well underway. It was under these circumstances that the Lutheran church known today as Fairview Lutheran was founded. It is a church that this year will celebrate its 80th year of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. Here is a small part of its story.

Fairview Lutheran Church is located on the corner of North 66th and Stevenson, about a block-and-a-half north of I-94. Directly east is Juneau High School, and 2 blocks north of the sanctuary is the always busy Bluemound Road. However, in 1923, this was still considered to be a rural area. Milwaukee's downtown was beginning to bloom and grow, yet this area, a mere 4 or 5 miles from Lake Michigan, was still sparsely populated. Although new homes were being built in the area, it was still in the stages of early development. There were still lots of wide open spaces between Milwaukee and West Allis. The only business in the area was a greenhouse, which used the open space to plant row after row of trees.

In January of 1923, Reverend Henry Lange was urged by the district mission board of the time to the task of canvassing in an area then known as Johnson's Woods. His objective was to find and to gauge the interest, if any, in founding a new Lutheran Church in the area. As he finished his survey of the area, he did indeed find an interest in building a church. Thus church services began a scant two months later, in March. The services were held in the homes of the charter members of Fairview. The first service was hosted by a man named August Wlochall.

It didn't take long for this young church which still didn't have a name to receive its first pastor. On May 6th of that same year, a Pastor Arnold B. Koelpin, of DePere, WI, was installed as the first resident pastor, again in the home of Mr. Wlochal. Another first that took place about a month later again as an unofficial church was the 1st baptism, on June 3rd, as Pastor Koelpin welcomed June Evelyn Zielke in the Savior's kingdom. Yet another first took place later on that month as George Smith and Jeanette Zophy were the first couple to be married at Fairview on June 23rd, still a month before the congregation even officially recognized itself.

Pastor Koelpin recognized the need to officially organize the church, and made it the number one priority on his list of things to do. Thus on July 16th, on a rather hot and balmy day, the congregation was officially organized by sixteen voting members. They chose to name the church Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, of the Wauwatosa Township. It seems that once the decision was made to officially found a church, that the



work got done a little more quickly after that. A short 9 days after coming up with a name, these same 16 voting members made a decision to build a chapel as well. There are still pictures of the first building, a very plain one story building, connected to another wooden building that was two-stories high. What perhaps was most amazing was that on September 9th, a mere 46 days after the decision was made to build a church building, it

was dedicated to the Lord's service. How did this take place so quickly? According to Elmer Schachtschneider, a present member of Fairview Lutheran: "The strip of land on the west side of 66th Street, one lot deep, from Bluemound Road to Fairview Avenue, was owned by a family whose mother and children were members of our church. The original lots ~~were~~^h the present church and the parsonage stand only cost the church a few hundred dollars."

Also during that first, extremely busy year, this congregation managed to become very organized. Already by the time that it was decided to officially organize into a congregation, there was a church council formed.

President: Emil Gust
Recording Secretary: Paul Stubbe
Financial Secretary: Reinhold Stubbe
Elders: August Lochel, Emil Gust and Paul Stubbe
Trustees: Albert Zielke, Carl Karlsen and Emil Walters
School Board: Albert Farchmin, Reinhold Stubbe and Jesse Horton

Also about this time, the first Ladies Aid was also formed, thus ~~ensuring~~^u that the people of this congregation were very willing to become involved in the ministry of preaching God's Word to the world.

The records of this early church also show that dedication to preaching God's Word. Perhaps what is most astounding about that first year is that the day after the building was dedicated, Trinity Lutheran Grade School was opened with an attendance of 50 children, ⁱⁿ offering grades 1-8. This first school was taught by Pastor Koelpin and a seminary student whose name could not be found. The first classes were taught in the same area where the Sunday services were held, and the next month, in October, a Mr. Edward O. Schmidt was called to be the first principal, and a Miss Lydia Pankow was called to teach the lower grades. Due to the large number of children, it was obvious that

the church could not for long be used as the school, so another addition was ^{built} added-on and dedicated in November of that same year. As the year of 1923 ended, the congregation had grown to 87 souls. So, to sum up, in a little less than a year's time, in a rather rural area of Milwaukee, a church had been founded, built, dedicated, remodeled, and had added a school. Certainly the Lord was blessing the growth of this congregation!

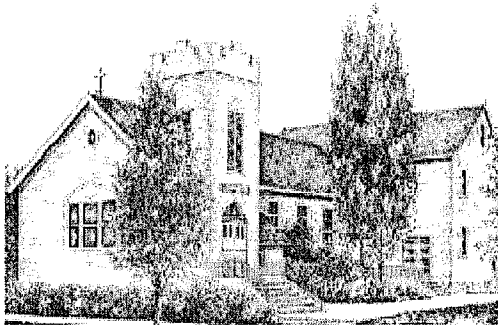
Not long into the year of 1924 there was another milestone: the first confirmands. While there are no exact numbers of how many were confirmed on February 28th, 1924, we do know this was an adult confirmation with at least 3 new members being welcomed into the congregation. Later on that year, on June 1st, Fairview welcomed their first child confirmands into membership, a class of 12.

Much of the membership of this young congregation were blue-collar. At that time there were many factories over in West Allis and in West Milwaukee, like Briggs and Stratton, and for most of the 20's, that is ^{where} were most of the membership worked. Like many congregations in the area, the services were mostly in German. As also the case in many churches, the language stuck around for awhile until the year 1946, over 20 years later, when it was decided by the congregation that the occasional worship services in German would be discontinued. The streets themselves around the church building were not paved, and there were no sidewalks either. There are still members who remember that when it came to spring, the snow would melt, and the area around the church and the playground would turn to quagmire.

In 1925, the time came for Trinity to join the WELS. No one seems to know why it was not done before, and it seems likely that there were just too many things happening far too quickly, such as building and remodeling and establishing that for awhile it was

put on the back-burner. However, the time came to become officially affiliated with the WELS. There are no records of there being any problems or disagreements with this decision, and no one remembers any big controversy surrounding this decision.

The next big event in the history of the church took place in 1929. The membership had pretty much tripled since 1923, now approaching 275 souls, and the school had more than doubled, topping out around 110. The facilities which had been built only 5-and-a-half years earlier were now no longer capable of supporting so many new faces. Thus the congregation undertook the task of remodeling their facilities, adding some extra rooms to the school, expanding the sanctuary area, and adding a bell tower.



Fairview member Les Kunst remembers back in those early days that quite often in cold weather he would have to climb up into the tower on Saturday evenings and kick the ice off the rope so that he could ring the bell reminding those near the church that services would be held the next day. More often than not, he would have to repeat the same task Sunday morning, calling the faithful members to worship.

This project was again finished the same year that it was begun, although this time with heavy borrowing from the Church Extension Fund. However, for those who remember their history, 1929 stands out as a dark year in the American economy. Just as

Fairview had dedicated the building came along Black Monday, and with it the plunge of the entire country into the Depression.

Before we discuss the history of Fairview during the 30's, we must turn our eyes to one more fairly important event that took place in 1929. As the building project drew towards its completion, the members of Trinity looked around and noticed that there were quite a few Lutheran churches in the area that had the same name. Thus they decided to change the name to Fairview Evangelical Lutheran Church. This was the name of the Avenue that was very close to the church, about a block east. Interestingly enough, the name Fairview Avenue got it's name from a mausoleum of the same name which had been located there for quite some time, and has recently been demolished. As a sidenote, for those who are interested in the geographical layout of Milwaukee, Fairview Avenue is the street that divides the city into north and south house numbers. How Fairview got its present name was of particular interest to me, since I remember from my grade school days that my principal, Mr. Kenneth Proeber, had often said that when he went to teacher conferences, other teachers often asked him if he taught at a public school.

Anyway, back to the Great Depression. Fairview had just remodeled their school and building at a rather inopportune time, since nearly half of the country was now unemployed. Mr. Schachtschneider remembers those days:

“This (debt) bothered the pastor (Koelpin) because we weren't paying the money back fast enough. This kept other mission churches from getting started. The pastor introduced an idea for raising money called the Joash chest...They (every family) was asked to put one penny on the box at each meal.”

This method seemed to work. Despite the fact that this depression lasted really until America got involved in World War II, Fairview had managed to pay off their debt of

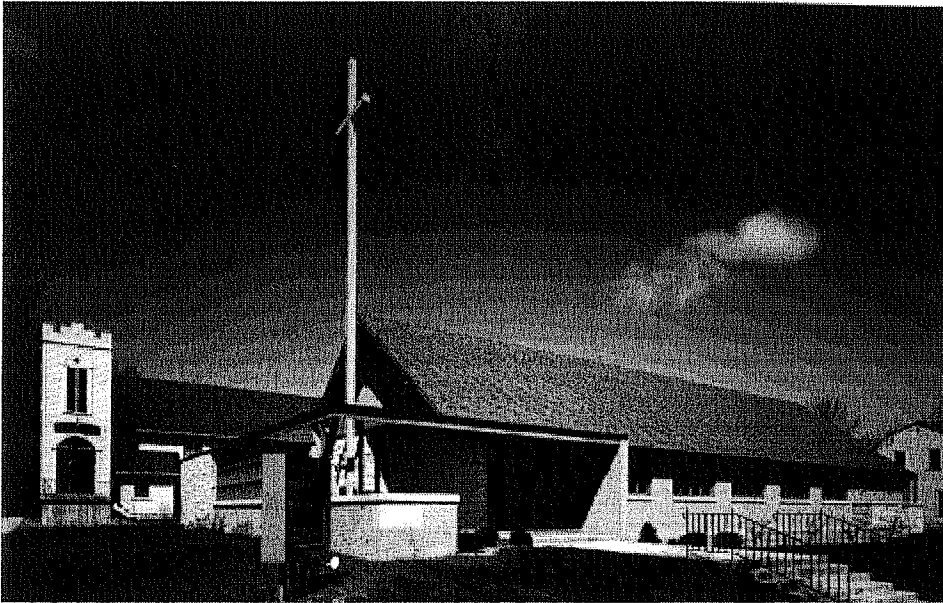
\$19,996, plus over \$4,000 in interest accrued. Truly the Lord had once again blessed this church in a time when many churches were forced to close.

The paying off of their debt was not the only significant event that took place in the early 1940s. The only pastor in Fairview's 17-year history, Pastor Arnold Koelpin, accepted a call to Caledonia in early April, and Fairview faced their first vacancy period. However, this did not last too long, as on August 4th of the same year, Pastor Paul A. Behn, of Whiteriver, AZ, was installed as the second pastor of Fairview Lutheran.

Three years later, in 1943, there are two important steps in Fairview's history. The first was that the school was expanded, and now offered kindergarten to all those who wanted to educate their children about the Bible. The first kindergarten teacher at Fairview was Mrs. Gladys Mischke, who if I am not mistaken, is the mother of former President Carl Mischke. Perhaps more importantly, Fairview had now grown to the point that they were able to drop their mission status and were considered to be a self-supporting congregation. Fairview's communicant membership was now up to over 400, and would remain so until the 1990s.

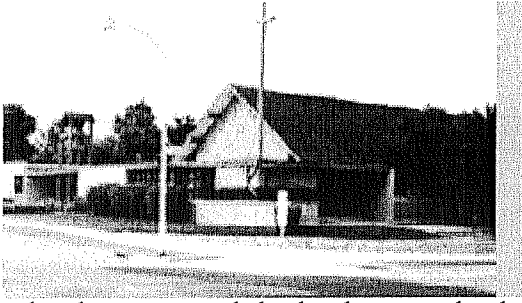
After the end of the war, America's economy continued to boom, along with the population, and the desire to build a new church was present among the people. The first discussions about building a new church are found in the records in 1948, along with some initial blueprints, yet the groundbreaking did not take place until 1959. Several members remember that Pastor Behn thought it to be a good idea to have a good amount of the money saved before they went and borrowed the rest to fund the building. Thus, most of the 50's passed with the Building Fund ~~eventually~~ ^{wife ?} growing until 1959. It was during this year that the church borrowed about \$100,000 dollars to build their new

sanctuary, already having saved \$60,000 through contributions by the members of the congregation. Groundbreaking services were held on February 1, 1959, and the new building was completed and dedicated to the service of the Lord a year later, 1960. As you look below, note that you can still see the old sanctuary in the background.



The decade of the 60's, unlike the rest of the country, was a time of relative peace for Fairview. Membership continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace. Members were pleased to worship their Lord in their new building. About the only significant change that took place was the calling of a new pastor, necessitated by Pastor Behn accepting a call to be a contact man for WELS outreach in Hong Kong. In 1968, Pastor Victor W. Thierfelder accepted the call to be only the 3rd pastor in Fairview's 45-year history.

As a new decade started in 1970, many in the church felt the time had come to replace the school building, which had served as a place to bring up children in a Christian education for nearly 50 years. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held in 1971, and a one-story, four classroom building, which still serves as the main building for the present-day school was finished that very same year, by the first week of October. The



school pretty much ^{looks} ~~looks~~ the same back then as it ^{does} ~~did~~ today, with the exception of a two-room addition which was added on in the mid-80's. In another milestone event of 1971, Mr. Kenneth Proeber was installed that year as principal, notable because he is still the present principal of the school, and has taught the Word of God to children in his classroom for the last 32 years.

As the 70's turned into the 80's, Fairview went through 2 more pastoral changes in the relatively short time of 10 years. Pastor Donald Kolander served faithfully from 1978 until 1987, when he went into retirement. In April of 1987, Pastor James Aderman, who had assisted the congregation earlier in the 80s when he served at Wisconsin Lutheran College, accepted the call to become the 5th pastor in Fairview's 55 year history. He still serves today, providing the spiritual sustenance that is only available to us through God's Holy Word.

The 1990's brought about some changes to Fairview. Pastor Aderman had injected the spirit of youth ^{into} Fairview, and the grade school was growing by leaps and bounds. The attendance in 1990 was well over 130, the highest it had ever been, and many thought that the time was right to call another pastor. Fairview was running in the black, and they were able to make many improvements to the sanctuary and the school. It seemed that the Lord was about to bless the congregation in ways that He had not previously. Thus a call was extended to Pastor Stuart Zak, and for the first time in Fairview's history, the church had two pastors. But this would not be for long. Offerings could not keep up with an additional called worker's salary, and when it was found out

that the roof needed to be replaced, Pastor Zak accepted a call to Fond du Lac, where he still serves today. Many members were saddened by these turn of events, and wondered if perhaps they had make a mistake in calling a second pastor in the first place. Attendance, both in communicant members and in the school, began to drop. Fairview did in this decade begin a pre-school, reacting to a trend that was taking place throughout the country, yet still the figures were on the decline.

As the new millenium dawns, this congregation finds itself with several challenges. It is located in a neighborhood ^{that} where people tend to move into as kind of a stepping-stone until they are able to move out into the suburbs. The core of the congregation is elderly, and although the school ^{enrollment} is holding steady at about 80-85 per year, many comfirmants quickly fall through the cracks and disappear once they move on ^{to} the high school. What is the solution? Only our Lord knows. As with us as called public ministers of his Word, we are required to be faithful in preaching the Word, and let Him worry about the details. We can be thankful that He has used that little rural congregation in ways known to Him for the last 80 years, and pray that he would continue to bless and use it's talents for 80 more.