

Growing Pains In Two South-Side Congregations:

St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church
&
Christ Ev. Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI.

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History shows that our Wisconsin Synod had meager beginnings. It wasn't a huge extravaganza where people flocked to see what was going on. It didn't qualify for front page headlines. Rather, history tells us the beginning was quiet and uneventful.

But for us members of the Wisconsin Synod, our synod's history does mean something. I guess you could call it an event. From those few mother congregation grew a church body which bases its teachings on facts from Scripture and not assumptions from men.

That is not to say that other churches don't have the true Word of God in their midst. However, based on the teachings that stem from human philosophy, there exists a definite distilling from truth to heresy. We can only speculate on the basis of confession as to how close other church bodies remain to the truth. With some confessions, they are as close to the truth as the east is from the west.

Nevertheless, the leaders in our synod are devoted in keeping the pure doctrine of God's Word the only source and norm for Christian life. Each individual congregation exists for the purpose of edifying its members and most importantly to continue the work of Christ's kingdom.

Looking back into the history of our early congregations, that spirit and eagerness for truth was evident in their activities. Although times were difficult, opposition great, and success limited, God provided the results as He promised: My Word shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

God's Word certainly accomplished what He pleased as our Wisconsin Synod spread over the city of Milwaukee. The city was incorporated on

January 31, 1846. By process of geographical location, Milwaukee could be divided into three sections:

The first section called Juneautown located east of the Milwaukee River was founded by Solomon Juneau.

The second section called Kilbourntown located west of the Milwaukee River was founded by Byron Kilbourn.

The third section called Walker's Point located south of the Menomonic River was founded by George H. Walker.

These areas were concentrated, compact groupings of people. Naturally, the language of the day was predominantly German with English on the rise.

Lutheran churches in Milwaukee numbered four prior to the birth of St. Peter's. There was at least one church in every section of town. There was Grace Lutheran organized in 1849 in Juneautown. Kilbourntown had two Lutheran churches: Trinity (1847) and St. John's (1848). The final section of town saw one church in its midst up to this time: St. Stephen's (1854).

The zeal for Christ's work did not end with these four parishes. Because of the concentration of church members in the area, there must have been a desire to move onward. Pressure from within may have been another cause for expansion. An overflow of people presented an "admirable" problem for expansion in our Synod.

Whether zeal or pressure, this desire to move was evident in the formation of St. Peter's Kirche. Members of St. John's, Kilbourntown, Grace, Juneautown, and excommunicated members of St. Stephen's, Walker's Point combined and met in a Norwegian Church at South 2nd and W. Scott St. Nothing is mentioned of these excommunicated members. I am lead to believe the church's action on these people was questionable. The only other conclusion is that these people repented of their sin and decided to

to join in this expansion.

Services were irregular in the afternoon held by Rev. Muehlhaeuser from Grace, and Rev. William Streissguth from St. John's. A word here may be in order to describe Rev. Muehlhaeuser's influence on the new-born church. J.P. Koehler says:

It must be said that Muehlhaeuser's influence was not along the lines of confessional development which the growth of a Lutheran Synod among the Germans of the Midwest called for. His aim was directed toward the gathering of souls. Still, he did not oppose the endeavors of pastors who were more intent on precise Lutheranism in the government of the body, he did not reject their advice and offers of help, but appreciated their work even when it meant his taking a second seat.

Muehlhaeuser let his light shine before men. He displayed a personal living faith, a child-like trust in His Savior and a unique desire to build up the kingdom of the Lord. He dedicated himself and directed his actions so as to bring glory to the church and lost souls to His flock.

President Muehlhaeuser urged 34 Lutherans to meet on February 14, 1860 to organize another church. This then is the birth of St. Peter's Ev. Luth. Church. Seven church council members drew up Articles of Incorporation and a constitution. Their pastor at the start was Pastor Muehlhaeuser with assistance from a student named Karl Wagner.

In May of the same year, a movement began to buy a frame church belonging to Congregationalists on S. 3rd St. The cost was \$200. The Congregationalists continued to use the building until January of 1861. This frame church was extremely mobile. This was apparent by the various moves from 3rd St. next to a Presbyterian church. Within the year, a lot measuring 50' x 140' was purchased on the northwest corner of 8th and Scott for a cost of \$600. April of 1861 saw the frame structured church move onto the new property.

The new-born church needed a full time shepherd. Again Muehlhaeuser was influential in choosing a man who would fill the needs. The man called

was Rev. William Dammann. He had served in Washington County when he accepted.

His reply was as follows:

I have received your call and will accept it. I shall come as soon as possible. However, I cannot state the exact time of my arrival, since I cannot just walk out on my present congregation. God must first supply the man who is to take my place. He's on his way from Germany and is expected to arrive soon.²

Dammann held services every Sunday morning now. The congregation itself became more stable than ever before, strong enough to start a school two weeks later. He had a knack for keeping precise records of his pastoral activities. One example recorded:

On November 3, 1861, a joint Mission Festival was celebrated in Grace Church participated in by St. John's, Grace, and St. Peter's. There were large numbers in attendance and the festival collection amounted to \$17.00.³

During his time as pastor, undesirable elements plagued Dammann. In 1862, a dispute arose over whether you should stand or kneel at the altar for communion. A matter of adiaphora ballooned into great dissension against Dammann and other members. This dispute raged until Pres. Bading and Rev. Goldammer were called in to settle the issue. The compromise was that all members should kneel during the confession and stand to receive the Lord's Supper. This settle the issue, but I am not so sure if everyone agreed. (That custom remained into the early 1960's. The kneeling custom has been dropped since mid-60's.)

Pastor Dammann desired to build his own parsonage on the church property. He agreed to do this at his own cost. The basic structure is still in existence at 814 W. Scott St. I guess this just proves how well houses were built in those days.

In 1863, Rev. Dammann bought a reed organ for \$100 from Watertown. Delivery was delayed so accusations popped up against the pastor. Streissguth was called in to clear Dammann of suspicion. The obvious charge must've been swindling the church's money. A comment from an anniversary booklet kind of puts light on all the troubles Dammann was experiencing:

It seems that a certain element delighted in worrying the pastor. That these members got into the congregation may have been due to carelessness in receiving members. After the atmosphere had been clarified by the excommunication of these rioters, a resolution was passed to exercise greater care in the reception of members.

A lodge question arose in this period to add salt to the wounds. The problem was discussed. The position that we hold today was maintained, namely that lodge members cannot be members of our congregations.

1864 saw the break through of another problem which could be characterized as a conspiracy. The whole problem was caused by a Mr. Brueggemann. His primary premise said that Rev. Dammann was out for greater things. Apparently, he believed the pastor was not sincere in his work and therefore was shirking his duties.

Brueggemann sought support from other members to depose the pastor and enthrone himself. But much to his dismay, the plan never worked. It was discovered that he had made himself guilty of misdemeanors in the classroom. When called on the carpet about these charges, Brueggemann fled secretly with \$300 of the church's money. Records say he was never found again.

In an effort to pay the bills with a shortened treasury, the congregation purchased a "wheel-of-fortune". 3,000 chance tickets were printed for a fair in 1864. Advertisements placed in the city newspapers prompted other congregations to do the same. But after a number of years, the whole idea became more of a nuisance and was dropped.

St. Peter's continued to grow. January 1866 saw the congregation build a new church incorporating the basement for the school. This structure was built for \$6,672. 35 pews were included at \$9 @ pew. Total cost of the new building came to \$7,191.

Monies were raised by the St. Peter's members. Other congregations underscored their support with financial help. Some of them were Racine,

Caledonia Center, Burlington, Greenfield, Grannville, Freistadt, West Bend, and Hartford. Dedication was on September 20, 1866. Three services were held and a total of \$160 was collected on the whole day.

I might mention that it appears St. Peter's and their pastor had nothing but troubles. During these years, there were "growing pains." Sometime those pains got very harsh and bitter. But we do see the finger of God in these affairs making all these difficulties turn out for the good of the church. The church definitely gained many members where it got to the point that one man could not do all the work. The pains were present, but so was the blessing of God Almighty.

During the pastorate of Rev. Dammann, dissension arose between St. Peter's and St. Stephen's in the year 1868. This is not surprising because a discussion was slated for October 21 & 22 in Milwaukee for the purpose of airing out the differences between Wisconsin and Missouri synods. Both factions agreed to place their differences before an impartial arbitration committee. This committee consisted of the Wisconsin and Missouri presidents, Pres. Bading and Pres. Walther, respectively. Representing the Wisconsin Synod besides Bading were Prof. Hoenecke, Revs. Koehler, Dammann, and Gausewitz. On the Missouri Synod side besides Walther were Prof. Bauer, Revs. Lochner, Sievers, and Strasen.

This gathering realized it was necessary to enter on doctrine. They emphasized doctrines which at present time still seem to be under debate. The doctrine of the church & ministry, ordination, inspiration, millennialism, and the Antichrist were covered. In these discussions, there was agreement on all points much to the delight of those present. Eight points were adopted as a token of the agreement of both parties.

- 1) Both synods recognize each other as orthodox Lutheran church bodies.

- 2) Both synods can practice pulpit and altar fellowship.
- 3) Relation between synods exemplified at meeting and conferences
- 4) Members of one synod can join the other upon certification of honorable release.
- 5) Disciplinary cases within a body is to be respected by the other
- 6) When two congregations from different synods disagree, efforts must be made to uphold Christian order and establish relationship.
- 7) Both synods retain the right to start new congregations anywhere as the need arises.
- 8) If in either synod, false teaching rears its head, each synod is bound to put down such an error with all means at its command.

This agreement was signed by all the members mentioned above.

The pastor at St. Stephen's lifted the ban on those excommunicated members who had gone to St. Peter's. The two churches restored their relationship and peace existed once more. Lenten and Advent services were joint efforts as a result. Rev. Dammann remained until 1873 where he organized St. Jacobi Lutheran Church. Here he served for 21 years until his death on February 21, 1894.

Rev. Damman was succeeded by Pastor Reinhold Adelberg where he served St. Mark's congregation in Watertown. During his pastorate there he assisted our college for three years. In 1873 he was called and preached his initial sermon on May 10th. During his stay at St. Peter's, he held symodical offices and was Vice-President of the synod. In 1879, the school building was erected and dedicated. In 1883, the present lot where St. Peter's stands today was purchased from a Mrs. Kueckental to provide room for a new church building. Again evidence of growing pains in this congregation was glaring.

It was during Adelberg's pastorate that 13 families asked for a peaceful release in order to start a new church west of 16th street. This was another necessary move due to the influx of German Lutherans who immigrated to Milwaukee in the latter part of the past century. St. Peter's grew to such enormous numbers at this time that this was the only route to go to relieve the pressure. More will be said about this move later. But for the

sake of chronological order, I include this event in the scope of the history of St. Peter's Church.

In 1885, membership at St. Peter's included 375 voters and 347 school children. The present building was not adequate to accommodate the tremendous influx of people. So the congregation resolved to build again. This structure would be next to the parsonage on the corner of 8th & Scott. The cost for the new church was \$36,000. The tall spires and the beautiful exterior truly made this new church a structure to behold. It seated 1,000 people. Church bells were installed in 1887. The large bell weighs 3,100 lbs., the second - 1,650 lbs., the third - 1,100 lbs. Total cost of hoisting and installation came to \$1,319.75. The church was dedicated to the glory of God on March 14, 1886.

The growing pains continued. While the congregation increased, the health of Rev. Adelberg decreased. He was granted a three month release for recovery in 1892. By this time membership had jumped to 416 voters. In another attempt to relieve the pressure, 11 families asked for their peaceful releases to start another congregation on 12th & Oklahoma. This eventually became St. Andrew's.

As time wore on, so did Rev. Adelberg. He never recovered as expected. Consequently St. Peter's called a younger man to carry on the huge responsibilities. Later Adelberg left St. Peter's to serve Gethsemane church on Layton Avenue for seven years. He was taken to his eternal rest on Sept. 9, 1911. It was under Rev. Adelberg that St. Peter's reached its greatest development.

Following Rev. Adelberg as shepherd was Rev. Adolph Baebenroth. He was called from St. Thomas in Milwaukee on October 6, 1895 and installed on December 8th of the same year.

Under Baebenroth, St. Peter's enlarged to new heights in membership: 435 voters, school enrollment dropped to 249. The Mixed Choir and the Ladies' Aid Society funded a new organ in 1913 at a cost of \$5,165. Two years later, they installed electric lighting to replace the old gas lights.

Pastor Baebenroth's health had become impaired. When he had to submit to a major operation in May of 1922, he felt he no longer could shoulder the responsibilities of so large a church. He submitted his resignation. It was accepted by the congregation in the sense that he would remain as assistant to his replacement. This he did for 3 years after which he retired. He then fought wavering health until his entrance into heavenly bliss on May 8, 1933.

The congregation, now without a shepherd, placed a call to Rev. Paul Pieper who was presently serving St. Paul's congregation in Cudahy. He was installed into his new parish on August 6, 1922 by his father, Professor August Pieper with assistance from Rev. Baebenroth and Professor John Meyer. Rev. Meyer had served St. Peter's as vacancy pastor.

Pastor Pieper found himself in a rather precarious situation concerning the condition of his church. The building was touching 40 years old now and by the time he began serving, it needed improvements immediately.

The foundation on which the church was built had to be replaced. The old railroad ties on which the building rested rotted away, causing the whole structure to sag. Houses in the area experienced the same misfortune. As the years progressed, this method of construction proved faulty.

So the repair was made at a very large expense to the congregation. A partition was placed in the rear of the church providing a restroom and an anteroom for the church board. The church had to be replastered and redecorated. All these repairs naturally raised the indebtedness. So a move had to be made to off-set the debts.

In 1925, Rev. Pieper was requested to make personal solicitations of all members to ease the debts. His efforts were successful with a total of \$12,000 raised. Next, the hall across the street from the church needed work. The same procedure followed with another solicitation in 1930. Again the Lord blessed the efforts with a return of \$14,000.

An old system of dues was a customary thing in the church's early history. But in 1924, the Duplex Envelope System was introduced. This new system ousted the idea of dues for the church. With this system, members could contribute to their church according to their ability on a regular basis. Needless to say, the envelope system gave people opportunity to support their church with the right motivation. The dues system implied forced giving to fulfill a requirement for membership in the church. The chief purpose for envelopes was to raise synodical contributions which had fallen off the mark. The effort worked. The congregation responded generously through God's blessing. It climbed higher for years in overall support of synod.

29 years ago, there was a complete renovation of the organ in Dec. of 1949. A third manual was added and the console was separated from the organ proper by moving it to the front of the balcony. Stops were added or increased. Funds for the renovation were provided by the choir with \$10,000 and by visitations to the people. Total cost of the electrification and renovation was \$20,725.75.

The effort was worth it! For a number of years, St. Peter's organ was recognized as one of the largest organs in the city of Milwaukee. Even today, the golden pipes and the beautiful wood-work stand out as distinguishing features. Though no longer the largest in the city, the instrument still rings out praises to our Lord and King for all His marvelous works.

Rev. Pieper spent the rest of his ministry at St. Peter's. He retired from the active work in 1965 after a fruitful 43 years of service in the Lord's kingdom at this church. On February 2, 1966, St. Peter's called only its 5th pastor in its 106 year history. Rev. Arthur W. Schupmann was installed on March 13, 1966 to be the shepherd of the Lord's flock. He is presently serving about 511 souls and 350 communicants.

The daughter congregation of St. Peter's is Christ Ev. Lutheran Church. As mentioned previously, St. Peter's grew to such large numbers that it had reached tremendous growing pains. Pastor Adelberg, and 14 others met on June 23, 1884 for the purpose of organizing another congregation west of 16th street on the south side of the city. The prospects were many. Geographically, this section of town was a "gold mine" for mission work.

The organization was rapid. They named the church Christ Ev. Lutheran Church. The small group purchased lots on the corner of 23rd & Greenfield for \$1,600. Construction of the first church cost \$4,500. This ambitious little flock needed a shepherd of its own. Pastor Henry Bergemann was installed on the first Sunday of Advent when the church and school were dedicated. The first floor was set aside for school, the second story was used for the church.

A church booklet tells of the active blessings of the Lord and why Christ Church experienced "growing pains". "Due to missionary spirit of the pastor and the immigration of Lutheran families from Germany to this part of the city, the congregation grew very rapidly during these years." Rev. Bergemann's health weakened after 38 years of faithful service. The church granted him a 3 month absence. But God in His wisdom took him to the heavenly mansions on November 5, 1923.

His son, Paul, became the next pastor. He was influential in promoting

English services on a regular basis. After 17 years of service, the Lord took him suddenly to his eternal rest while administering private communion to one of his parishioners.

Rev. Walter Kleinke became Christ Church's third pastor on May 11, 1941. Sources say he was full of vigor and enthusiasm for the work. But after a year in service, the Lord afflicted him with a throat ailment that impaired his speech. Months of seeking relief proved fruitless. So it became apparent that it would be better had he resigned. This he did on August 24, 1942, $1\frac{1}{4}$ years after he began.

$3\frac{1}{2}$ months later, Christ Church received their 4th pastor in the person of Rev. Herman Cares installed on Dec. 6, 1942. Similar to St. Peter's situation during Rev. Pieper's stay, Rev. Cares had a major repair job to do along with his regular duties.

During the course of his ministry, growing pains showed themselves in the church and school. With the congregation on the rise, the entire property on 23rd & Greenfield could be refurbished. Examples are: the steeple and roof fixed up in 1948-49 for \$35,000; interior of the church redecorated in 1952; new chancel furniture, new lights, new floor and carpeting the same year for another \$35,000; exterior masonry of the church repaired and the brickwork cleaned for \$14,000 in 1955-56.

I mention this information because I feel this is another picture of the growing pains that existed in Christ Church. When the building needed expansion, there was agreement to go ahead with the job. In this way too, the work of the church could be carried on more efficiently. Here too, the Lord blessed the efforts of the faithful laborers in His harvest. Christ Church numbers about 700 souls and 522 communicants today and is presently being served by Rev. David Tetzlaff.

Over the course of 118 years for St. Peter's and 94 years for Christ church, our Lord has truly blessed these congregations with faithful laborers. Through the years, the "problem" of growing pains has been a rewarding one for these laborers and for their parishioners. Granted, times change and so do congregations. But the message of Grace for sinful creatures does not. Our Wisconsin Synod has been blessed to have the pure word of truth to continue in these churches throughout their own history. The same is true for these churches. For within their walls, there has always been the message of truth. For over a century, God's grace in every detail has been preached to the joy and edifying of the saints. The word of comfort which is lacking in the world does not lack in the church. It is found there in these houses of the Lord.

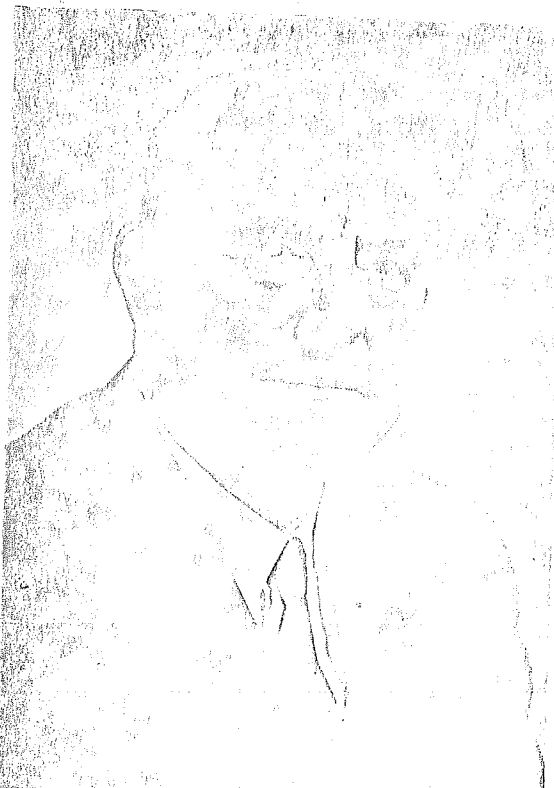
We are thankful to our Lord for providing that original influx of German Lutherans who were concerned enough to spread His Gospel throughout the community. From their efforts blessed by the Lord, St. Peter's and eventually Christ church was established. Through His blessing today, St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church and Christ Ev. Lutheran Church stand as reminders to all that God's Word does not return unto Him void, but it accomplishes that which He pleases, and it prospers in the thing whereto He sends it!

Sources for material and quotes taken from Anniversary Booklets of both churches and J.P. Koehler's The History of the Wisconsin Synod.

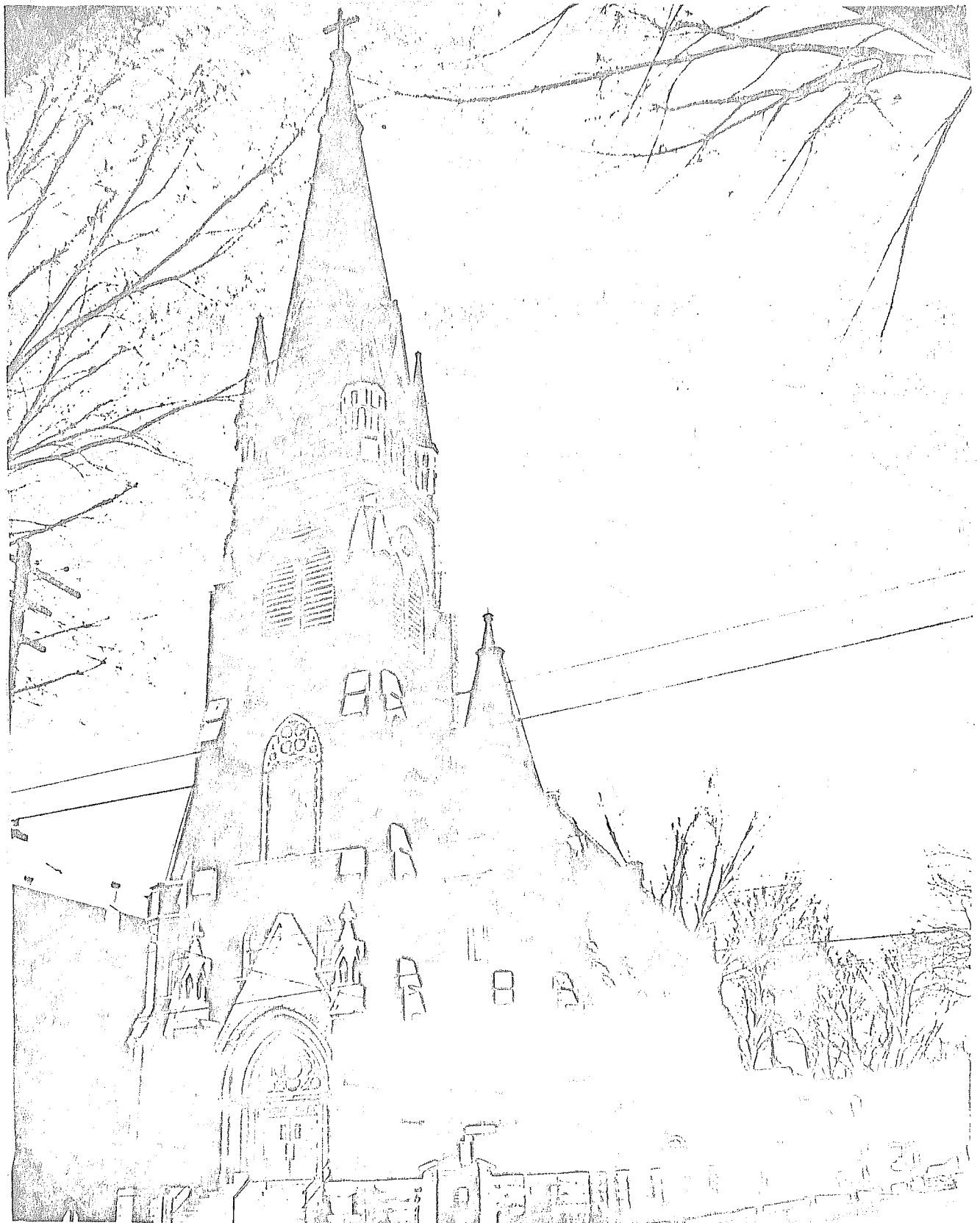


Rev. W. Dammann

ST. PETER'S EV. LUTHERAN
CHURCH



PASTOR PAUL PIEPER
1922-1965



CHRIST EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH