

The Early History of St. Paul' s Ev. Lutheran Congregation, East Troy, Wisconsin

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In 1874 fifteen families in and around East Troy organized St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church. Pastor J.J. Meier served the small congregation as well as a congregation in Elkhorn from his home in Slades Corners. On July 1, 1875 a constitution was adopted. At this same meeting, the members decided to unite with the Elkhorn congregation to form a single parish. It was resolved to call Pastor J.J. Meier as pastor of the joint parish. Pastor Meier received and accepted the call in the spring of 1876. The East Troy members pledged \$125 towards Pastor Meier's salary, and promised to increase this amount as soon as possible. In 1876 the members also voted to join the Wisconsin Synod at its next convention, and to draft a new constitution.

Several questions might arise concerning this young congregation. Why did they want to draft a new constitution? Why were the first six pages of the 1875 constitution pasted shut? The church record book listed baptisms until 1879, communion registrations until 1877, marriages until 1879, and burials until 1877 - then, the congregation disappeared. What happened to the joint parish with Elkhorn? Why did St. John's congregation disappear from the scene? The history of Peace Congregation at Elkhorn indicates that Pastor Meier left Elkhorn in 1879, with the congregation then being served by Pastor Wm. Buehring from Beloit. Did St. John's congregation fold when Pastor Meier left the area?

In 1880 Pastor Fr. Schneider from, a Missouri Synod congregation in Waterford took an interest in the Lutherans in East Troy. He suggested that they organize a congregation. A number of Lutherans met to discuss the matter. On March 15, 1880, a new congregation was incorporated under the name St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of East Troy, Walworth County, Wisconsin. A constitution was drawn up, discussed, adopted, and signed by ten men. Of the charter members it appears that four were still living when the 1903 church was built.

Pastor Schneider became ill during his first year with the new congregation and resigned. The members once again turned to Elkhorn and its pastor, Wm. Buehring. He served the congregations as well as congregations at Afton and Clinton until he accepted a call in 1881.

On July 10, 1881, the members adopted what was apparently a new church congregation. In 1882 they joined with Peace Congregation of Elkhorn to call a new pastor. The arrangement was made that the pastor would live in Elkhorn. Pastor John Dejung, from Prairie du Chien accepted the call in 1882.

The Gemeinde Blatt issue of December 15, 1881 announced the installation of Pastor Dejung in an interesting article. Pastor A. Liefeld wrote that the day was filled with surprises for him. He was asked to install Pastor Dejung and preach the sermon. On the second Sunday of Advent, Pastor Liefeld boarded a train for the sooty ride to Elkhorn. When he reached Elkhorn at 9:20 AM, he was surprised to find that East Troy was still twelve miles away, and that a second installation service was set for 2:30. At 10:00 he found out that East Troy was also planning to dedicate their new church building in the afternoon. Actually, the members didn't know if the dedication would be that Sunday or not, for they were still working on the building until midnight the night before. Pastor Liefeld had an installation, dedication, and finally a sermon to preach.

The Gemeinde Blatt wrote that the "new" building had actually been used by an English congregation (Congregational Church) for twenty years. The English congregation abandoned the building when they needed more room. The building was sold and became a blacksmith shop. After a few years, the building was changed into a housepainter's studio and workshop. After a few more years the small Lutheran congregation (possibly St. John's congregation?) wanted to buy it and make it into a church. However, the congregation was not able to

purchase the building, so it was rented to a man who installed a ciderpress. Finally, the building was purchased by St. Paul's congregation in 1881. Pastor Liefeld closed the article with this wish: "May this house, through God's grace, be used for God's service, and be a workshop of the Holy Spirit and a fountain, where the stream of life flows for the refreshment of the tired and heavy laden".

Pastor Dejung held worship services every other Sunday. The congregation decided to hold a reading service on the Sundays when no worship service was held. Two men were chosen to read the sermon on such occasions. The members also decided to conduct a Sunday School for the children. During Pastor Dejung's ministry in East Troy the congregation voted to buy pews from the congregation at Elkhorn and to have four extra pews ten feet long made for the price of \$4.50 each. Each member was assessed fifty cents for the pews, the balance to be taken out of the treasury. Pastor Dejung accepted a call to Eldorado, leaving East Troy on November 22, 1885. At a meeting on December 26, 1885, the congregation resolved to charge non-members \$2.00 for a baptism and \$5.00 for a church wedding.

On November 22, 1885, the congregation sent a delegation to Elkhorn to help call a new pastor. Pastor Huth of Whitewater was called, but returned the call. A successor was found, however, in the person of Pastor Tim. Sauer, a candidate from the Wisconsin Synod Seminary. Pastor Sauer was ordained and installed by Prof. E. Notz on the first Sunday in February, 1886. He was known as a man of youthful zeal and motivated by real love for his calling and for his work in the congregation. The two congregations paid him \$375 per year. In 1892 the amount was increased to \$425.00. Pastor Sauer started a Christian Day School in Elkhorn and taught it himself. In East Troy he conducted a summer school. The congregation decided to reimburse Mr. Braun for boarding the pastor during the summer. \$5.40 was collected for this purpose. On April 11, 1887 the congregation resolved to build a school building, but at a special meeting called for May 1887, they decided not to build a school for the time being. The congregation voted to join the Wisconsin Synod on January 2, 1888. It is reported that Pastor Sauer was one of the first in our Synod to preach in English occasionally. In November, 1892 Pastor Sauer accepted a call to Bay City, Michigan. The President of the Wisconsin Synod urged him to accept the call, since the congregations in Elkhorn and East Troy could easily be served by neighboring pastors.

During the time that the two congregations called for a new pastor, the members at East Troy were each assessed 50¢ for boarding a pastor during his duties in East Troy. Mr. Wittenbecker offered to keep the pastor for \$10.00 per year. Pastor Karl H. Auerswald accepted the call and was installed into his office in January, 1893, by Pastor J. Oehlert of Burlington. A year later, Pastor Auerswald was permitted to select his own quarters when serving in East Troy.

Pastor Karrer of Waukesha, who served a small congregation in Mukwonago, asked Pastor Auerswald to inquire of the East Troy congregation whether it would like to join with Mukwonago in a joint parish. A committee was appointed to discuss this matter with the Elkhorn congregation. The Elkhorn congregation agreed to East Troy's request, but at a special meeting called on July 22, 1894, the East Troy congregation voted to keep the present arrangement. Pastor Auerswald then asked for permanent quarters while serving in East Troy, especially during school time in the summer. No one in the congregation offered accommodations so it was resolved to release Pastor Auerswald and to seek service elsewhere.

Pastor Gustav E. Schmidt was called in 1894. After Pastor Schmidt's graduation from our seminary, he served for a year and eleven months as missionary in northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Making his home in Marinette, Wisconsin, he served many congregations throughout that territory. Ill health forced him to resign but after six months he began to preach again, assisting the pastors of the congregations at Mukwonago and East Troy. On August 28, 1894, he was installed as pastor of these two congregations. Living

at East Troy he served the Mukwonago congregation for twelve years and St. Paul's congregation at East Troy until his death in 1940.

In October of 1894 the congregation permitted Pastor Schmidt to rent a suitable dwelling in the name of the congregation. At the same time subscriptions were gathered for the building of a parsonage. It was decided that subscriptions of \$10.00 by January 1 or by April 1 at the latest would be required if a parsonage was to be built. The fund drive must have been successful, because in January of 1895 a Mr. Jacob Beyer's lot was bought for \$200.00, and a building committee was appointed. In April of the same year plans were approved for building the parsonage for about \$1,000, not including mason work and several other items. The new parsonage was built in 1895 on North Church Street.

A highlight of 1896 had to be St. Paul's mission fest. The mission fest was almost cancelled because of the cost of the new parsonage, but the members wanted to cooperate in helping to "build the kingdom of God".

The festival was held on September 27. The Gemeinde Blatt reported that many people attended, including brothers and sisters from the congregations at Mukwanago and Elkhorn. In the morning Pastor Albert Bartling from-1-1aterford preached how every Christian is a preacher of the gospel, and with great zeal and joy can do mission work. After the members were refreshed by a delightful noon meal prepared by the women of the congregation, everyone gathered for an afternoon service. Pastor Martin Sauer of Waukegan, Illinois, preached in English-about the goal of their mission fest. In both services a quartet and "Kinderchor" sang under the direction of Miss C. Braun. The collection brought \$29.67. Mission fests were held every year, either in East Troy, Mukwonago, or Elkhorn. Sometimes East Troy held its festivals in Swoboda's Woods, or used the Baptist church in town.

St. Paul's congregation looked into the possibility of building a new church. In 1896 land was purchased on South Church Street. Later, in 1898, the members inquired about the purchase or trade of the white Baptist church next to their new parsonage. Finally at a special meeting on February 19, 1903, the congregation decided to build a new church at \$3000 to \$4000, and appointed a building committee. It was resolved to raise as much money as possible at once and to retire the remaining debt at \$200 per year. the church was to be built of brick on the lot on South Church Street, with work to begin as soon as possible.

The cornerstone for the church was laid on May 17 1903. The contents of the cornerstone (opened in 1969) included:

Synod reports of conventions held in 1901 at Winona, Minnesota, 1902 at Milwaukee, and the sixth gathering of the Joint Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other states held at Mankato, Minn, in 1901.

a horse shoe

an 1894 quarter

a Synod Annual from the year 1903

The New Testament, published in Berlin in 1898 by the British and Foreign Bible Society

a Lutheran Hymnal, published in Milwaukee by the --Evangelical. Synod

Martin Luther's Small Catechism, published by Northwestern Publishing House in 1901

a listing of the members in 1903, including 37 voting members, 44 families, totaling approximately 250 souls

a brief history of the congregation typed by Pastor Schmidt in German the day before the cornerstone was laid.(This manuscript and the other contents were ruined because of moisture and age)

two business cards: Ebert Bros. Mason Work; and Milwaukee Mirror and Art Glass Works

St. Paul's congregation dedicated their new church building on October 25, 1903. The members first gathered in the old Baptist church which they had used the last months. After singing the hymn "Unsern Ausgang segne Gotte," they traveled to the new church. Then the congregation sang "Thut mir auf die schoene Pforte" and Pastor Schmidt read the 122 Psalm. The first sermon in the new church was delivered by Pastor P.C. Jager from Racine. In the afternoon Pastor Tim. Sauer from Appleton, a former pastor of the congregation, preached an edifying sermon. That evening an English service was held with Pastor P.F. Graeber from Milwaukee preaching. The collection, designated for the building fund, brought over \$150. The women of the congregation served meals at noon and in the evening.

The Gemeinde Blatt reported that the new building was of red brick. The length including the altarnich and tower was 72 feet the width 32 feet. The tower, topped by a golden Greek cross, was over 86 feet high, and carried a bell weighing over 1200 pounds. The altar, and baptismal font were made of oak, the benches of elm, and the doors and window frames of cypresswood. The windows were of opalescent glass, created by Karl Reimann of the Milwaukee Mirror and Art Glass Works. The lighting fixtures are gas. Under the church in the basement was a 28X32 schoolroom. The young people of the congregation donated nearly \$700 towards the bell, altar, and benches, while the women of the church donated the pulpit. The value of the church was placed at over \$8,000.

The church record book listed the cost of the new church as follows:

receipts:

Subscriptions and gifts	\$3,223.00
Gifts to window fund	109.00
Collection at Cornerstone laying	67.53
Collection at Dedication	143.67
Bell fund	234.00
For the old church	<u>60.00</u>
	39,837.20
total expenditures	4,955.40
remaining indebtedness	\$1,118.20

The congregation resolved in October 1905 to retire half the remaining debt on the church. A year later old members of the congregation were each assessed \$5.00 for the debt retirement, new members were asked to contribute as they pleased. Any remaining debt was to be divided equally among the old members.

Following the building program, the congregation asked Mukwonago to increase their part of the pastor's salary. Mukwonago offered to contribute \$50 more. In November of 1905, the Mukwonago congregation decided to call their own pastor and dissolve the joint parish as of January 1, 1906. East Troy agreed to this arrangement.

The year 1906 brought a significant change for the congregation in East Troy. For over thirty years the congregation formed a parish first with Elkhorn, and then with Mukwonago. All three congregations had grown to the point that they needed their own pastors. Since 1906 East Troy has had its own pastor for its congregation.

July 15, 1906 was observed as the silver anniversary of St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran congregation. Pastor Auerswald returned to preach a sermon in the morning based on Genesis 12.2. In the afternoon, Pastor A. Moussa from Burlington preached on I Corinthians 1:4-9. while Pastor D. Hagedorn preached an evening sermon based on Acts 2:42-47.

The Lord has richly blessed the members of St. Paul's congregation since the day in 1874 when Pastor J.J. Meler came to East Troy and brought the Word of God and the Sacraments to the German settlers of this area. The first twenty five years in the congregation's history were years of growth and activity -- from the first fifteen families to a congregation of fifty families and over 250 members. The remodeled Congregational church, by the grace of God, was outgrown. The 1903 church building served the congregation for a period of over fifty years before it too was outgrown.

This history gave some of the items of physical growth in the life of the congregation. The spiritual growth under the Spirit of God was more important but less evident to the eye. Certainly, the number of souls added to God's eternal kingdom was great, for He was working in this congregation, not only in the first twenty five years, but also in the next seventy five years-indeed, He continues his work today.