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## THE HISTORY OF ST. PETER LUTHERAN CHURCH

God has richly blessed the congregation of St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brodhead, Wisconsin, for almost 91 years at the time of this writing. They have had many faithful pastors. They have endeavored in building a new church building and a new parsonage. Their most recent addition was an education wing that was added in the late seventies. But how did this church begin. Where are the roots planted? Obviously, for any church to last any amount of time God must be the foundation. God holds things together. With that in mind let us take a journey from the beginning of St. Peter to the present day.

### BEGINNINGS

A small German church in the township of Sylvester (near Brodhead) on County Highway F named St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church had a few members that began moving into the Brodhead and Albany towns. These members decided to form their own church called St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church. The first recorded church service in Brodhead was held on July 7, 1912. The pastor who served here from 1912 to 1914 was the Reverend Fred Reddin who was also the pastor at St. Paul's. The services and Sunday school were held in people's homes until the construction of a church building. All services were conducted in the German language. Slowly, as membership increased it became necessary that they find a more suitable place to worship. The members of the Norwegian Church at 1305 15<sup>th</sup> Street, which is now a private residence, agreed to rent their building to the members of St. Peter.

## THE EARLY YEARS

In 1914 Pastor Reddin was replaced by C.F. Baerwald. Pastor Baerwald was called to serve St. Paul's and only served St. Peter's as a vacancy pastor. Problems arose, however, between the members of the Norwegian Church and the members of St. Peter's. The year was 1918 and World War I was progressing making people in America unfavorable towards the German population who lived in the area. Considering that the people who were members of St. Peter's were Germans, the Norwegian Church asked the members of St. Peter's to find another place to worship. Therefore the elders of St. Peter's began a search for another place to worship.

Not only did they find a place to call their own, the Wisconsin Synod helped them by giving them their own minister, the Reverend William Radar of Prairie du Chien. The cost of the building that was purchased was \$600.00. This amount does not seem to be very much until a person sees that Pastor Radar's salary was \$300.00 for the whole year! Also, to make the building suitable for worship, extensive remodeling had to be done. It needed a new roof, more windows for light, an altar, and electric wiring for the lights. The doorway was also widened to allow for funerals.

At the first service that Pastor Radar preached at, the building was not yet ready. The date was March 30, 1919. Not only did Pastor Radar preach, but he also baptized the oldest life-long member of St. Peter's, Gilbert Hintz. The first service held in the new building was on July 13, 1919. Members brought their own chairs because the pews had not yet been installed. The organist was Mr. Fred Buetow who played the pump organ for \$1.00 a month. He was also in control of heating, which meant he built the fire, for which he was paid \$5.00 a month. Formal dedication of this new church building took place on

September 28, 1919. St. Peter's now had their own place to worship and conduct their Sunday school and Bible classes. St. Peter's was considered a mission church until 1966 and was supported by the Wisconsin Synod.

In 1922 Pastor Radar resigned and Reverend Richard Siegler served as the vacancy pastor. The first English services were held in 1922 but German services continued until 1946. In January 1923 St. Peter's officially joined the Wisconsin Synod and once again received a pastor. The pastor was Reverend Gustav Zimmer, who was the first pastor that member Gilbert Hintz said that he could remember.

In 1925 the members of St. Peter bought a parsonage for Pastor Zimmer to live in. It was a tan brick house at 1006 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Pastor Zimmer was also a chiropractor and kept his practice until members voiced their objection. Pastor Zimmer then resigned from St. Peter's the same year. Reverend Henry Allwardt then served the vacancy until 1928. That same year, due to the Great Depression, the church could not support the upkeep of the parsonage so it was lost. They also were not able to support a full time resident pastor so they sought help from another congregation until they could support their own pastor again. (The name of the congregation that helped out could not be acquired.)

From 1928 to 1937, Reverend Herbert Schumacher came from Milton, Wisconsin, every two weeks to hold services in the afternoon. At the request of the members, English would be alternated with German at every other service. During Pastor Schumacher's time the members started the first envelope<sup>s</sup> system in hopes that it would bring more weekly contributions. This was not received well by the members because of the Great Depression years at this time.

In 1937 St. Peter's were again able to have their own resident pastor. Reverend Roman Biesmann, a recent graduate of the Thiensville Seminary was called. He also served mission congregations in Monroe, Wisconsin, and in Illinois. During this time the first mimeograph machine was purchased and regular bulletins were now able to be printed. In 1938, the constitution was translated into English. In the fall of 1939 Pastor Biesmann accepted another call to Rib Falls, Wisconsin.

The members of St. Peter were fortunate to receive another pastor as early as December. Reverend Erwin Schewe has<sup>d</sup> previously served in Racine, Wisconsin. He was asked by the Synod to serve another small church in Belle View, Illinois, and to continue mission work in Monroe in order to eventually establish a church. It was during this time that the first Vacation Bible School was held. Also during Pastor Schewe's stay the church underwent some refurbishing in 1941. The woodstove was replaced with an oil burner. Carpeting was installed and the inside was wall-papered and painted. In 1943 a bell was given to St. Peter's by Pastor Schewe's home congregation, St. Peter's Milwaukee. The bell was installed in 1944 after a bell tower was built. Pastor Schewe accepted another call in March 1944.

Once again St. Peter's was fortunate to receive a pastor by June. Reverend Eldor Toepel became the new pastor. It was also in 1944 that the church bought the new blue hymnals. Pastor Toepel was serving three congregations now. He was serving St. Peter's along with the congregation in Belle View, Illinois, and the mission congregation in Monroe, Wisconsin. The mission board decided that the work load for one pastor was too great so a new Seminary student graduate was assigned in 1946.

Reverend Mentor Kujath arrived and was installed in January 1946. In the years previous to Pastor Kujath's arrival a choir was assembled to sing only on very special occasions. Pastor Kujath requested that a full time choir be organized. Therefore, Clara Rhyner, who was also the organist, became the first full time choir director. She was a very active member as she also taught Sunday school classes. It was in this year that the German services were discontinued. But at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary service held in 1949 the service was held in both English and German at the request of the members.

In 1947 the old pump organ was retired and was sold to a member who later donated it to the Green County Historical Society. A new Hammond organ was installed and Clara Rhyner took special lessons to become acquainted with all the new pedals and sound controls. The organ was dedicated on November 23, 1947.

In 1948 Pastor Kujath was called to serve a new mission church in Janesville, Wisconsin. Pastor Kujath continued to serve St. Peter's also until 1953. The church in Janesville now had a parochial school and the work load had grown too large for Pastor Kujath to serve St. Peter's also. The members were fortunate to receive another pastor right away, this one from Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois.

Reverend Roland Welch was installed shortly after Pastor Kujath returned his call. It was at this time that the church council felt the need to build a parsonage. They bought a lot next to the church and built a ranch style home that was completed in August 1954 and dedicated in 1955. The interesting thing about the parsonage is that it had two indoor restrooms which allowed the outside one to be torn down. Pastor Welch took a call in July 1955. Reverend Reinhard Bittorf, of Mount Olive – Monroe served as the vacancy pastor until May 1956.

In May 1956 Roland Hillemann was installed. Besides serving St. Peter's, he was asked by the mission board to establish mission churches at Beloit, Wisconsin, and Belvidere, Illinois. In 1958 Pastor Hillemann resigned as the resident pastor at St. Peter's and accepted the call to Good Shepherd, Beloit, where he would later establish a parochial school. Pastor Hillemann continued to serve as a vacancy pastor from time to time. Professor Erwin Scharf from Northwestern College and several other student pastors served the vacancy also.

In 1960 Harry Schaar arrived to serve St. Peter's. He remained the resident pastor until October 1965 when ill health forced him to resign. Pastor Hillemann from Beloit served as vacancy pastor once again.

#### NO LONGER A MISSION CHURCH

In 1966 Reverend Wayne Schneider was assigned from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to serve as the new pastor. (Coincidentally, Pastor Schneider was the bishop of Vicar James Heffner, the first man from St. Peter's to enter into the full time pastoral ministry.) It was at this time that West Luther Valley Norwegian Church in rural Brodhead came to the elders of St. Peter and asked if they could join the Wisconsin Synod because of the conservative Biblical teaching that took place at St. Peter's. The Norwegian church was renamed Bethany Lutheran Church. The mission board decided that two churches could support Pastor Schneider and St. Peter's ceased to be a mission church.

For many years St. Peter's had talked about having a larger, more adequate facility for worship, as well as extra room for Sunday school and fellowship meeting areas. A building committee was formed to set the wheels in motion. Much planning

needed to be done before they could start to arrange for such a project. In March 1967 a city block was purchased on the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue for the future site of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church. This complete block of land would provide enough room for a new church building, a parking lot, and a new parsonage.

In 1968 an architect was hired and the building of a new "A-frame" church was started. Also in 1968 Lureen Roenneburg graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College. She was the first student to become a Christian day school teacher from St. Peter's.

On June 1, 1969, the new church building was finished. The dedication service was held on June 29, 1969, when all the inside furnishings were in place. Some of the pews from the old church were moved into the choir loft. The rest were given to Bethany. The hand made altar and pulpit were donated to the Green County Historical Museum in Monroe, Wisconsin. The baptismal font was donated to Good Shepherd, Beloit. The stain-glassed windows were donated to Mount Olive, Monroe. The dismantling of the old church was complete in October 1969. On December 7, 1969 the inside of the new St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church was on the cover of the Northwestern Lutheran. The total contract price for the complete building having 5,160 square feet was \$73,000. The cost of the complete project, including all furnishings, land, parking lot, and architect's fee was \$90,000.

In January 1971 Pastor Schneider accepted a call to Savanna, Illinois where he still is serving today. When Pastor Schneider left St. Peter's received weekly visits from professors and student pastors. Then in July Reverend Verlyn Dobberstein, a recent graduate, arrived to serve both churches. In October 1973 Pastor Dobberstein started the Boy and Girl Pioneers.

In 1975 some dissension among the members of Bethany Lutheran Church caused that church to withdraw from the Wisconsin Synod. For security reasons the church council decided to build a parsonage on the church grounds in June 1975. After several bids the Robert Riese Company offered to buy the old parsonage and build a new tri-level, 4 bedroom home. The council decided to accept this offer and within a week the money needed was loaned to St. Peter's.

In January 1976 Pastor Dobberstein accepted a call. Once again the Lord blessed the members of St. Peter's by sending them another pastor by March of that same year. Reverend Paul Ziemer was installed as the new minister. Immediately he saw the need for better educational facilities. The council formed a building committee and put an addition on the west side of the church. This was the last addition or change that was made. This is the church as it stands today. The educational wing would contain Sunday school rooms, separated by folding door curtains, book shelves, cupboard storage, a print room, furnace room, an addition to the present kitchen so that serving could be done in the new wing. It was completed and dedicated in April 1978.

The church then saw the need to replace the 30 year old Hammond organ. A committee selected a new Allen Church Console that was dedicated in July 1979. The old organ was purchased and presented to the mission church located in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

In May 1981 Pastor Ziemer accepted a call to Virginia and St. Peter's was once again without a pastor. But in the spring of 1981 Reverend Steven Spencer, a recent graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was ordained and installed. During Pastor Spencer's stay the church celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of God's grace. In November



1986 Pastor Spencer accepted a call to a mission church in El Paso, Texas. After one call Pastor Marcus Neumann accepted St. Peter's call and arrived right away in December 1986. Pastor Neumann is still faithfully serving St. Peter's today.

#### THE PASTOR NEUMANN YEARS

Pastor Neumann came to Brodhead in 1986 and much has happened since he has been at St. Peter's. He has been very influential in encouraging young men to consider the public ministry. In the fall of 1989 Pastor Neumann suggested to James Heffner to consider the public ministry and possibly attend Northwestern Preparatory School. Heffner had gone to public school his entire life and was not ready to go away for school. Pastor Neumann helped Heffner get correspondence courses from UW Madison in Latin and later in German. Pastor Neumann faithfully taught Latin and German to Heffner all through Heffner's high school career. After high school, with Pastor Neumann's encouragement, Heffner enrolled in Northwestern College in the fall of 1993.

In 1994 St. Peter's celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the new church building. Then in 1995 the church underwent a bathroom and kitchen renovation. In 1996 Pastor Neumann sent his son to Northwestern Preparatory School to possibly become a fourth generation pastor.

One thing that hadn't been in place for a long time at St. Peter's was a youth group. By 1999, under the direction of Randy Riese, St. Peter's had a youth group in place. Together with Randy Riese Pastor Neumann has been involved in planning activities and outings for the youth of St. Peter's. The members are very thankful for the work that has been done by Randy Riese as the youth group leader.

#### PASTORAL STUDENTS

There are now officially two pastoral students that are members of St. Peter's. James Heffner who <sup>was</sup> graduated from Martin Luther College in May 1998 is attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and is expecting to receive a call in May 2003. He will be the first student to ever go all the way through the pastoral ministry program from St. Peter's. Much thanks deserves to go to Pastor Neumann in encouraging Heffner until he was convinced himself that this was what he wanted to do.

The other pastoral ministry student is Pastor Neumann's son Robert. Robert is a junior at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Robert is looking forward to graduation from MLC in May 2004 and is excited about attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary the following fall.

Besides these two pastoral students, Pastor Neumann is always watching for students that may have the gifts for the pastoral ministry and encouraging them to consider the ministry.

#### THE FUTURE OF ST. PETER'S

In the summer of 2002 St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Pastor Schneider returned to give the sermon on 90 years of God's grace. The future of St. Peter's is very bright. While there are some problems, as there are in any church, St. Peter's is a thriving congregation with more than 150 communicants and more than 200 souls. St. Peter's a strong confessional Lutheran church with a faithful pastor who preaches God's Word faithfully. And that is the key to any church – God's Word being taught in it truth and purity. With God's Word and the faithful members of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church may the Lord bless St. Peter's with another 90 years of faithfulness!

## SPECIAL THANKS

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