

CONTINUING GRACE, 1866-1991:
UNDERSHEPHERDS OF THE FLOCK

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Continuing Grace, 1866-1991: Undershepherds of the Flock
(A Short Biography of the Pastors of St. Paul's Lutheran
Church, New Ulm, Minnesota)

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those
who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good
tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

The Lord indeed has been gracious to his people here on earth. This grace goes beyond what he sent his son into the world to do for us. It is a continuing grace. Through that grace he guides his people, as a shepherd guides his flock. In order to exercise his guidance over the whole flock, the Lord calls undershepherds to carry the Gospel into all the world. These are those who bring good news. They proclaim salvation to all people. They say to the Church, "Your God reigns!" God saw a need to send undershepherds to guide his flock in New Ulm, Minnesota. Since the beginning of St. Paul's congregation in New Ulm, there have been over fifteen undershepherds in almost one hundred twenty five years. These years have seen growth from a few families meeting in a living room to a large congregation, served by three pastors and meeting in a church able to seat 800 people in a single service.

The city of New Ulm is little more than ten years older than St. Paul's congregation. This small settlement was like other establishments on the western frontier. It was built on the Minnesota and Cottonwood rivers. It was a good trading post. New Ulm was founded by a group of German colonizers, called "Chicagoer Landverein". The city was

founded on May 30, 1855. These settlers had as their aim and purpose ". . .to have no church organization in their town. But God willed otherwise."¹ The settlers did not want churches, but that did not stop God from bringing church people into the settlement. Slowly but surely, congregations began to grow and churches were built. The Catholics and the Methodists were the first to establish congregations, but the Lutherans were not long after them.² During August 18-24, 1862, there was a fierce Indian attack and massacre of people living in the New Ulm settlement. After recovering from this tragedy, "many new settlers now began to appear, and with them came more families of the Lutheran faith, particularly during 1864 and 1865."³

These Lutheran families got together in order to practice Christian fellowship and worship their Lord together with other people of common faith. On July 30, 1865, a group of them met at the home of Mr. Friedrich Boock. They organized into a congregation. Because of the mixture of religious beliefs among them, the congregation was called "The Evangelical Lutheran Reformed St. Paul's Congregation in New Ulm, Minnesota." They dedicated their first church building on June 17, 1866, on the land southeast of the present church.⁴ There were several families of the Reformed faith that joined that original

1. The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 28, 1941, p.216.

2. Koehler, John Philipp, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, p.174.

3. Northwestern, Vol. 28, 1941, p.174.

4. Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District, p.235.

congregation. On June 2, 1867, when the congregation wanted to join the Minnesota Synod, they were not allowed on account of the word "Reformed" in their name.⁵ "By the grace of God, however, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession was adopted as the congregation's confession of faith."⁶ In 1869, the President of the Minnesota Synod, ". . .Praeses Sieker prevailed on the congregation to strike the 'Reformed' from its name and also eliminate the unionistic forms of worship, and the congregation became a member of the synod."⁷ Much of the heritage of the congregation was in the German immigrants who were its members. Even through the anti-German times of the World Wars, St. Paul's remained a bilingual congregation. German services continued until the last German service was conducted in the summer of 1968.⁸

After the tragic Sioux massacre of 1862, religion started to grow in the German community of New Ulm. A German missionary had come west on the request of one of the German Lutherans. This missionary was C.F. Heyer. He became the pioneer missionary of Minnesota. He "arrived in St. Paul July 25, 1855, as an emissary of the Home Mission Board of the General Synod."⁹ Heyer had heard of the Indian massacre in New Ulm. "His ears rang with the tales of

5. Koehler, p.174.

6. Northwestern, Vol. 28, 1941, p.216.

7. Koehler, p.174.

8. Fredrich, Edward C., The Minnesota District's First Fifty Years, p.16.

9. Neve, Dr. J.L., A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America, p.333.

barricades, street fighting, cold-blooded murder, women and children hiding in cellars." He also knew that in the years before this, religious organizations were not allowed in New Ulm. But in 1866, he arrived in New Ulm. "The anti-Christian spirit had largely disappeared, and people were willing to listen to a preacher again." Heyer served the small congregation of Lutherans there. "By June 17, 1866, a fine brick Lutheran church was dedicated." The hard work and tact of Heyer had been rewarded.¹⁰

Heyer, however, was not ready to settle down and make New Ulm his home. He was still filled with the zeal to open other churches in other communities. However, the Lord decided to delay his journey. "An attack of facial rheumatism prevented Heyer from undertaking new projects in St. Anthony and Minneapolis. He did find time to see that the congregation in New Ulm was properly supplied with its first resident pastor, the Rev. Frederick Papp."¹¹ Papp had just completed his training and this was his first parish. He found that he was not very well suited for this young congregation and he stayed only a few months.¹² After a short time, the congregation called Pastor August Kenter to serve them. Not much is known about him other than he served St. Paul's from July of 1867 until September of 1869.¹³ For eleven months after that, the congregation was vacant. Finally, in August of 1870, Pastor Gottlieb Reim,

10. Bachmann, E. Theodore, They Called Him Father, p.282.

11. Ibid.

12. Jubilee History, p.235.

13. Ibid.

the former praeses of the Wisconsin Synod, took charge.¹⁴ During his ministry, the congregation grew to include about ninety families. "On July 15, 1881, a devastating tornado struck and heavily damaged St. Paul's church and parsonage. With the assistance of surrounding congregations of the Synodical Conference a new church building was erected."¹⁵ Unfortunately, Pastor Reim was not able to see the completion of that project. "While on a sick call to the home of a member across the Minnesota River in Nicollet County, he had an accident and fell. The fall proved fatal, and he died on June 22, 1882."¹⁶

Shortly after Reim's death, St. Paul's called its next minister. This undershepherd lead the flock into its greatest period of growth. During this period, St. Paul's grew in membership, its building grew, and its influence on the Church at large also grew. This undershepherd was Pastor C.J. Albrecht. He was born Christian Johann Albrecht, on July 13, 1847, at Eshenau, Wuerttemberg, Germany. He was the son of Heinrich and Christine, nee Schilling, Albrecht.¹⁷ He received his training at St. Chrischona school. This preparatory school adequately prepared him to become a Lutheran minister. He graduated in 1872. He was married to Mary Frey. Shortly after their wedding, they left their homeland and came to the United States. In November of 1872, Albrecht "was installed as the

14. Koehler, p.174.

15. Jubilee History, p.235.

16. Schroeder, Morton A., A Time to Remember, p.14.

17. Northwestern, Vol. 11, 1924, p.252.

pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Lewiston, Minnesota, which had been founded in 1866."¹⁸ They remained in Lewiston for only three months. "In early 1873 he accepted a call to Greenwood township in Hennepin County, Minnesota." He remained there for nine and a half years. In addition to serving the congregation there, he started at least one other congregation. That congregation is now located in Buffalo, Minnesota. From there he proceeded to his final pastorate at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minnesota. Albrecht was called to St. Paul's in the summer of 1882. "The association of congregation and pastor lasted 42 years, and the blessings and happiness they mutually enjoyed was marred only by the untimely death in 1897 of Pastor Albrecht's faithful wife after only 25 years of marriage."¹⁹

"On August 20, 1882, Pastor Christian Johann Albrecht began his ministry at St. Paul's and two months later, October 22, the congregation dedicated the first church to stand on the site of the present building."²⁰ It is true that this building project which was carried on mainly under Pastor Reim, but it was one which was typical of the ministry of C.J. Albrecht. During his 42 years at St. Paul's, there was hardly time for C.J. to relax. He was constantly involved in one project or another. "In a session of the former Minnesota Synod held at New Ulm in

18. Schroeder, pp.13-14:

19. Ibid., p.14.

20. Jubilee History, p.235.

1883, he was elected president of this body. This position he held for eleven years."21 He was fifth president of the synod.22 He took this office very seriously. He was a man of deep convictions and was not afraid to put those convictions into practice. There is a well known quotation taken from A Century of Grace, the centennial history of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Ulm: "Pastor Albrecht. . .had keenly felt the need of a synodical school for the training of workers in the mission fields of this area." He got St. Paul's congregation to support him in his promotion of this idea. They supported their pastor with moral as well as financial support. "Congregations which had contributed to St. Paul's rebuilding after a recent tornado must have been astonished at the rapid recovery of the patient."23 At the same convention where C.J. Albrecht had been elected president of the synod, St. Paul's brought forth a proposal. This proposal was "most appropriate as a recognition of the 400th birth-year of Dr. Martin Luther, suggesting that no project could respond more fully to the greatest immediate need of synod than the establishment of an institution for the Christian training of the youth and as a supply-house of much needed workers in the Church."24

This project was the greatest of Albrecht's ministry. This institution is today the teacher training college of our Wisconsin Synod, Dr. Martin Luther College. "The name

21. Northwestern, Vol. 11, 1924, p.252.

22. Ibid., Vol. 28, 1941, p.217.

23. Schroeder, p.14.

24. Continuing in His Word, p.108.

of the Rev. C.J. Albrecht is intimately connected with the history of DMLC."²⁵ He was the foremost man interested in starting this institution. He began spreading his idea by mentioning it to his congregation. "One of the members of the local congregation, Mr. Friedrich Boock, proposed that the pastor inquire of the members of the Minnesota Synod whether it would not be possible to establish an educational institution in New Ulm." Pastor Albrecht was overjoyed to hear someone share his opinion. He, however, traveled to neighboring congregations looking for others who also agreed with this plan.²⁶ Pastor Albrecht then brought his proposal to the synod convention in 1883. He was grateful to the Wisconsin Synod who had offered use of their educational institutions to the Minnesota Synod. However, Pastor Albrecht felt that they needed at least a preparatory school in Minnesota.²⁷ In addition to their proposal, they offered four acres of property and \$7,000 to be used for this institution.²⁸ The amount of cash varies according to different sources. According to some sources it was only \$4,000, but they all say that the offer would be substantial if the school were built in New Ulm.

Albrecht was convinced that such a school would do more than train workers for the church. "He was also convinced that such a school would do much toward consolidating synodical consciousness, and that it would likewise offer an

25. Schroeder, p.13.

26. Continuing, pp.173-174.

27. Ibid., p.174.

28. Jubilee History, p.236.

excellent opportunity for the Christian education of children beyond the elementary grades even though they did not intend to prepare for the ministry. The Synod's response was favorable to the project."²⁹ Even with all the support Albrecht's plan received, there were still drawbacks. "Three factors seemed to go against the New Ulm proposal for a Minnesota Synod school: the relative youth of St. Paul's congregation, the natural disasters which had visited large parts of the state, and the poor financial condition which the congregation had found itself in after the tornado of 1881. However, the enthusiasm of Albrecht and some laymen. . .carried the day."³⁰ They managed to convince the rest of the synod of the advantages of having their own theological seminary and preparatory school. This idea had been discussed in conferences and private meetings many times before 1883, but nothing was done with it. Not until C.J. Albrecht changed the sentiment into action.³¹

Pastor Albrecht put all his energy into the plan. Since no better offer had been made, other than the one St. Paul's had made, New Ulm was chosen as the site for the school.³² The New Ulm people were so excited about their plan, they could not wait to get started. "Before the stipulated \$14,000 was at hand, the energetic New Ulm burghers on the appointed building committee and their even

29. Continuing, p.174.

30. Schroeder, p.17.

31. Continuing, p.29.

32. Our Synod and its Work, p.161.

more energetic pastor began building operations."³³ The original plan changed in one way. A new suggestion had come from Mr. E.G. Koch. He was another enthusiastic member of St. Paul's. He suggested building the new institution on the wooded bluff west of New Ulm.³⁴ Thus, even to this day DMLC is known as "a city on a hill". The school was dedicated on November 9, 1884. As could be expected, Pastor C.J. Albrecht preached the sermon on that day. Pastor Albrecht served the new school as director until Pastor O. Hoyer of St. Paul filled that position in January of 1885.³⁵ Even after this, Pastor Albrecht did not quit. He was a member of the College Board until the 1920's.³⁶ He helped out, when needed, teaching religion courses at the college. He certainly had put his dedication and spirit into building Dr. Martin Luther College.

Certainly all Wisconsin Synod Lutherans owe C.J. Albrecht a debt of gratitude for his efforts in founding and building DMLC. He unselfishly served that school until his death.³⁷ He was truly a remarkable man. "Albrecht was a man of apparently inexhaustible energy and stamina. . .The early records show him to have been here, there, and everywhere--almost simultaneously;. . ." He was, after all, serving as pastor of St. Paul's in New Ulm, president of the Minnesota Synod, and also helping build up the new college.

33. Fredrick, p.24.

34. Continuing, p.174.

35. Ibid., p.175.

36. Northwestern, Vol. 11, 1924, p.252.

37. Our Synod, pp.161-162.

"Albrecht was also a man of vision, and his foresight proved on more than one occasion to be a blessing to the church. . . together with his speaking ability, to persuade his sometimes reluctant listeners that his was the only course to follow."³⁸

He was very dedicated to the furthering of the Gospel. He was not only interested in a training college, he also worked toward better Christian education for the children of St. Paul's in New Ulm. Just a year after the college opened its doors, St. Paul's opened a Christian Day school with 75 students. In 1886 they needed to add a second room to the old church in order to accommodate the rising enrollment.³⁹

When C.J. Albrecht came to St. Paul's, they were just completing their new church. While he was there, in 1899 an addition was made to the church. Also two schoolhouses were built, and a new parsonage was constructed.⁴⁰ It was indeed a time of growth.

On July 27, 1924, Pastor Albrecht suffered a paralytic stroke.⁴¹ After a short time, the Lord called his servant home. He had been granted his one desire, to serve the Lord until his death. "His last ministrations were two funerals on June 23. On the following Friday, early in the morning, he suffered a paralytic stroke. This stroke came on so painlessly that the deceased would not believe that he was seriously ill. He lingered along for almost two weeks, and

38. Schroeder, p.13.

39. Jubilee History, p.236.

40. Northwestern, Vol.11, 1924, p.252.

41. Ibid.

the end came on peacefully and calmly on Thursday, July 10, at nine a.m. The funeral services took place on Monday, July 14. From far and wide pastors had come to be present."⁴² Many came to pay respect to this pillar of the Synod. No one could measure the influence which this man had. It went far beyond just the congregation of St. Paul's in New Ulm. "He was instrumental in bringing about a cooperation between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods."⁴³ He was a great motivation and a man who never knew the words "too busy". He also had a great zeal for the work of the Gospel. He was instrumental in the founding of the China Mission which was a part of the Missouri Synod. "At all times showed a childlike trust in God and a faithful adherence to His Word. Yea, the strength of his days was labor and sorrow. But in this he gloried. He was filled with but one devotion, and that was to be a servant of his Master. How finely did he not portray this in the poem he wrote shortly before his death: Lord here am I."⁴⁴

The biographies of the pastors from here on in will be shorter due to a lack of information out on them. After the death of Pastor Albrecht, St. Paul's was vacant only for about four months. The call to succeed Albrecht was accepted by Pastor Gerhard Hinnenthal, who served the congregation for almost twenty-five years.⁴⁵

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Jubilee History, p.237.

Gerhard Hinnenthal was born on August 12, 1878, in Watertown, Wisconsin. His parents were Pastor William Hinnenthal and Maria nee Schoenhals. After seven years, the family moved to Kaukauna, Wisconsin. Gerhard attended the Christian Day School there. He returned to Watertown to attend the preparatory school and college there. He graduated from college in 1900. On July 1, 1906, he married Rosa Quandt. After he graduated in 1903, he was ordained and installed in the congregation at Black Creek, Wisconsin. He served there until 1908. He then served at Buffalo, Minnesota until 1915. From there he went to Goodhue, Minnesota and served until 1924. "On November 2, 1924, he was installed as pastor of St. Paul's Congregation at New Ulm, Minnesota."⁴⁶ In the fall of 1946, Pastor Hinnenthal became ill and required surgery. He regained most of his strength and health. He was still able to serve St. Paul's after his surgery. In the spring of 1949, however, his strength rapidly declined because of a heart ailment. He was unable to continue his service at St. Paul's. On July 11, 1949, he retired from the ministry. He retired just three months short of twenty-five years of service at St. Paul's. Pastor Hinnenthal passed away during the early morning of October 12, 1949. He had carried on a very successful ministry. From 1919 until 1925 he served as Secretary of the Joint Synod. He was an active member of the Board of Dr. Martin Luther College. He was a member of

46. Northwestern, Vol. 36, 1949, pp.413-414.

the Board of our Home for the Aged at Belle Plaine, Minnesota even up to the time of his death.⁴⁷ Pastor Hinnenthal was a faithful shepherd to the flock at St. Paul's New Ulm, as well as the Church at large.

When Pastor Hinnenthal was hospitalized the first time, St. Paul's went ahead and called another pastor to serve them. The next pastor was Pastor Walter John Schmidt. He was born on March 8, 1904, in Racine, Wisconsin, to Mr. and Mrs. August Schmidt. He attended the Christian Day schools at St. John's Lutheran and First Lutheran in Racine. He attended Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He married Margaret Mayer on September 15, 1931. He was ordained in 1927 at Flasher and Carson, North Dakota. He stayed there until 1934. From 1934 until 1941 he served Faulkton-Ipswich parish in South Dakota. From 1941 to 1946 he served St. Matthew's Lutheran Church at Danube, Minnesota.⁴⁸ In 1946 he accepted the call to St. Paul's, New Ulm. He served there for 26 years.⁴⁹ He retired in 1972. On April 30, 1977 he was called to his eternal home. He experienced several strokes. Still he remained in relatively good health until his death. In fact, he was called home in the afternoon of April 30, after spending an active morning digging dandelions and grooming his yard. Like his predecessors, he too was influential in his work for the Church at large. He was a member of the Board of

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., Vol. 64, 1977, p.189.

49. Jubilee History, p.237.

Regents for Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota. He was first vice-president of the Minnesota District for a number of terms. For six years he was a member of the Doctrinal Commission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.⁵⁰ He faithfully served his Lord as undershepherd of the flock at New Ulm and the flock at large.

The rest of the undershepherds of the flock do not have anything written about them yet since their history is in the last twenty-five years. They are: Pastor Thomas C.W. Henning (1962-), Pastor Leroy Dobberstein (1972-1978), Pastor Lloyd Hahnke (1978-1984), Pastor Ronald Uhlhorn (1985-), and Pastor Donald Scheuerlein (1985-). Because of the size of the congregation, there were many assistant pastors who helped out at various times. These assistants were: Rev. LeRoy Ristow, Rev. Charles H. Lueker, Rev. George Baer, Rev. Fredrick Kempfert, and Sigmund Hillmer.⁵¹ Several faculty members from DMLC have also helped out at times.

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minnesota, has remained a pillar of strength for the Minnesota District, as well as the Wisconsin Synod for almost one hundred twenty-five years. The Lord has seen to it that his Gospel was always before his people in New Ulm. That is a Continuing Grace which will extend until our Savior returns in glory to take all Christians home with

50. Northwestern, Vol. 64, 1977, p.189.

51. Jubilee History, p.237.

him. Christ, the Good Shepherd, has supplied St. Paul's with a continuing list of faithful undershepherds. They have given faithful service both to the congregation in New Ulm and the the Church at large. I am sure that, were they all alive, they would join with me in saying: "To God alone be the Glory."

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