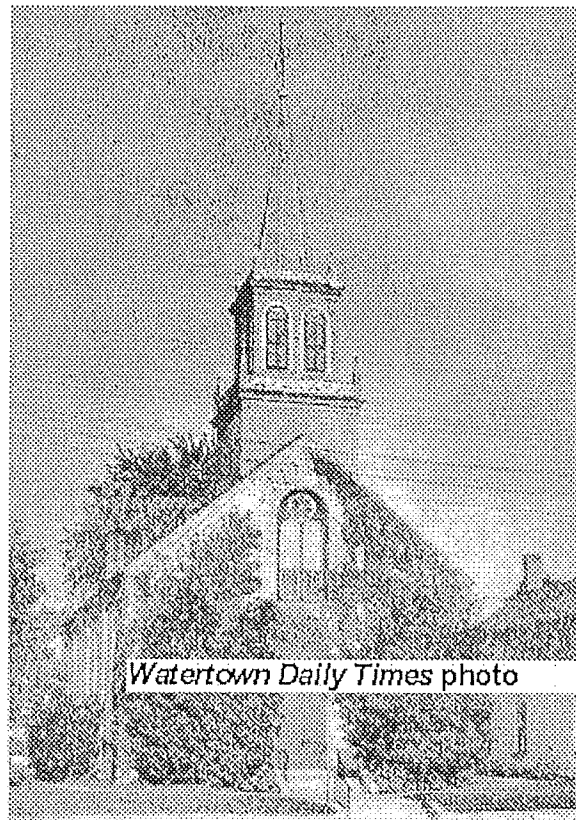


# The Long Journey of Independence to Find a Home

St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI



Church History 3031

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Watertown, Wisconsin has always been a city of great importance for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod throughout the years of its existence. Many of the pastors that have served the WELS at some point in their life spent some time in Watertown as a student at Northwestern College. Today there are four WELS churches in Watertown. They are St. Mark's, St. Luke's, St. John's, and Trinity. The histories of these individual churches and how they came to become affiliated with the WELS is diverse. In almost all of these cases one church was a break off of another, but what many people do not realize is that the oldest of these four churches was an original Watertown church and did not officially become a member of the WELS for over a hundred years of its existence as a congregation. St. Luke's is the oldest of the WELS churches in Watertown today, but for years they were independent and free of any synodical affiliation. The journey to find a home, both in church body and confession, was long and at many times troublesome.

In the 1800s, Germans were coming to the United States for various reasons. Some were coming at this time for religious freedom since they could not worship how they wanted in Germany because of the Prussian Union. Many others came to seek a better life. As far as can be determined, the founders of what would become St. Luke's congregation came for that reason; to have a better life here in the United States. Many of these people who came were not intent on establishing a strict Lutheran or Reformed congregation. Some were not really interested in religion at all. Those that were interested came out of the German State Church so this would have an impact in the way it was run, especially in the early years.

The official organization date is unknown exactly. The first meeting minutes come from a congregational meeting on January 7, 1849. In this meeting, council members were elected to replace the men who had served because their terms had expired. So from that it can

be concluded that the congregation was organized as late as 1848 or maybe earlier. No records were kept by the church or by the county before this time. The name of this new congregation was not decided upon until March 26 of that same year. The congregation was named the Evangelical German Church of Watertown<sup>1</sup>. It was decided the church would be a “free” or “independent” church that would only hire pastors who were Lutheran, Reformed, or Evangelical. The early founders also decided that under no circumstances would they join a synod or other church body.

At the same meeting in 1849, the members also began thinking about building a church. So they began to take pledges and a building committee was elected. At this time and up to the time when they built the first church building, they met at the William Wiggenhorn residence and hotel, also known as the Buena Vista House, on the northwest corner of N. Fourth St. and James St. The day after they organized officially (March 27), the congregation met again to discuss the location of their church. The land located on N. Fourth St. was offered by Ebenezer Cole, Luther Cole, Edmund Bailey, and Linus Cady. Together the land was valued at \$80.00. The Coles and Bailey both offered to donate the land, but Cady asked for his \$20.00. The Cole brothers and Bailey still donated their land so out of gratitude, their families were given pew seat assignments valued at their share for the land for the rest of their life. To help pay for the church anyone wishing to become members were expected to help cover the cost of the building and the salary of a spiritual leader. Their new church building was dedicated in May of 1851. The *Watertown Chronicle* reported this church dedication.

The Evangelical German Church in this village was consecrated on Sunday last, by its pastor, F. Rentzsch. The members of the German Singing Society performed the choruses and the whole service was solemn and impressive. The building owned and

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<sup>1</sup> Some places the church is called the “Evangelical Protestant Church”. The congregation must have gone by both names. Even in some of the later church minutes, they call themselves by this name.

occupied by the society, is eligibly situated on Fourth Street, is large and well arranged. The altar and pulpit are pieces of workmanship highly creditable to the society and the builder.<sup>2</sup>

When the congregation began, the founders knew nothing of the doctrine of the divine call. For a long time, their pastors were hired like any other position. The congregation advertised in newspapers. Each pastor had a contract that was up for renewal annually. If the congregation was not pleased with the pastor, then they could simply not renew his contract. When a pastor was interested in serving at the Evangelical German Church, he would preach a “test sermon” or two. Often there would be more than one pastor interested and then the congregation would have a vote to determine which pastor would get the job. The first few years the congregation was served by “volunteer preachers” until September of 1850. On September 15, 1850, Pastor Johann George Friedrich Rentzsch was elected as the first official pastor of the congregation. Pastor Rentzsch was an independent Lutheran pastor. His salary was not set until July of the following year which also included a housing allowance. The way they met the salary goal was to tell every member household to pay two dollars each year for the pastor on top of their two dollar dues to support the church.

Because the early members came out of the state church of Germany, stewardship was not understood very well. Back in Germany the government took care of paying the pastor and the upkeep of the building. When they arrived in Watertown, this was a new concept for them. Church finances were tough and it was hard to pay the bills. Already it is seen in October 1851, the congregation turned to a legalistic viewpoint on supporting the church. People were not paying their dues to support the pastor’s salary. A month earlier each the members were asked for fifty cents to cover insurance fees and more construction on the church building. That was not getting paid either.

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<sup>2</sup> “Consecration”, *Watertown Chronicle*, May 14, 1851

At the congregational meeting on October 5, some jaw dropping decisions were made. Names were read aloud at the meeting of those who had not contributed to the pastor's salary and asked to explain if and when they would pay their share. The next resolution provides an image of the tax collectors of the Roman Empire.

It was resolved that a treasurer be named for the collection of the preacher's salary, and that he be paid six cents if he collected from the person in arrears the first time he is approached, and twelve and a half cents if he gets it on the second attempt. In case the person in arrears pays nothing the second time his name will be stricken from the membership list.<sup>3</sup>

The goal in that meeting was also to elect a treasurer, but no one wanted the position because the duties were too time consuming. It is not hard to imagine other reasons for not taking the job. A treasurer was finally elected in January, but he wanted nothing to do with the pastor's salary. He would only deal with the church finances. So Pastor Rentzsch offered to take over the finances for his own salary. The constitution was altered later that month to include this duty as one of the pastor's jobs. This outcome did not seem to make much difference. The problems persisted.

At the end of 1853, those who had not paid their share were given an ultimatum. They had four weeks to pay or they would be dropped from the congregation. Those who were too poor to pay were given six months, but everyone else had four weeks. In reality they had more than that because it was not until the January meeting of 1854 those thirty four names (including their families) were taken off of the membership list of the congregation. This decision was unanimous of those who were attending, but was not final. There were apparently many disagreements over the next few months even a threat of congregational split. Those who were released were given another chance. Pastor Rentzsch in June motioned that the

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold Lehmann, trans *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, October 5, 1851.

congregation rescind the previous resolution giving them more time. “That those who were dropped should not be considered dropped on the basis of the constitution, but that these members should be considered as ‘leaving on their own free will’ if they do not take care of their obligations to the church within six weeks from today.”<sup>4</sup>

The issue was explained further in *Anzeiger*, a German periodical, less than a week later. “Our local German Evangelical Congregation, after two months of bickering has begun its reorganization with intensity. It has established regulations to do a better job in securing an income for its pastor...It has repented of past hasty actions.”<sup>5</sup> The article goes on to say that their actions against these members went against the church’s constitution and invites those dismissed to return having the six weeks to pay. Also in the future those not paying had that same grace period of six weeks. Apparently some in this time period had joined another congregation because of the previous actions. So they were also labeled as leaving the German Evangelical Church voluntarily.<sup>6</sup> Every now and then throughout the years, people are mentioned of being removed or suspended from the right to vote because they had not paid their dues and obligations.

The issue still was not solved completely. Later in 1854, Pastor Rentzsch left Watertown for Pomeroy, Ohio, but since he was responsible for collecting his own salary he wanted what he was owed. So he wrote a letter to be published in *Anzeiger*. He pleaded for the money that he was owed with a threat since he had a list of those who still owed him. “No respectable person could or would want to wish that I lose even more than the fruits of four years of labor, and therefore it should not surprise anyone if I within six or eight weeks turn the

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<sup>4</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, June 4, 1854

<sup>5</sup> “Church Matter” *Anzeiger*, June 10, 1854

<sup>6</sup> This seems to be a possible reference to those who left either begin or join the congregation now known as St. Mark’s.

over to a lawyer or a justice of the peace for collection.”<sup>7</sup> There is no further notation regarding this issue. The congregation does not speak of it all in the minutes.

After these turbulent times, the congregation began to settle down for a little while. Pastor Rentzsch was replaced by Pastor Henry Doerner. As it was frequently these days, Pastor Doerner was replaced in 1859 by Pastor Peter Joerris who was elected by the congregation. Even Joerris did not remain long. He was replaced just two years later by Pastor Carl Rettig who did not stay very long either. This kind of pattern would continue for a long time. From its beginning until 1890 they had thirteen pastors and most only staying for less than five years

The next pastor to serve the congregation was Pastor Heinrich C. Fack. He was elected on September 14, 1862 and his contract was signed on October 5. Before coming to the congregation, he attended several Wisconsin Synod conventions and had applied for membership on many occasions, but was never accepted. At the end of 1862, Pastor Fack suggested the congregation join the Protestant Association by reading the constitution of that association. A committee was elected to look into the suggestion, but came back two weeks later recommending not to join that group. “The committee...presented to the congregation the results of their investigation that after thorough and careful scrutiny they found that under present conditions it is not feasible for the congregation to join the Protestant Association at the present time.”<sup>8</sup> The congregation was not ready to join a church body probably thinking back to the original resolutions not to join one under any circumstances. Two years later again the congregation was invited to join the Protestant Association and Pastor Fack again asked the congregation to accept along with sending two delegates to the convention. Instead Pastor Fack was given permission to go and return with a report. However he was given no travelling

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<sup>7</sup> “Notice”, *Anzeiger*, Oct. 7, 1854 (repeated the following two editions)

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, January 11, 1863

expenses or reimbursements. There was no record of anyone ever going to the convention and nothing more was ever mentioned concerning this matter. No doubt this was because the congregation was facing more pressing matters.

The original church building was becoming an issue. There was not enough room and the building was falling apart. They did add on a balcony to create seating, but there were other problems. The roof was in bad shape and again financially the congregation was fighting lack of funds. With this lack of funds, the council recommended that only extremely necessary repairs be made to the church. They requested members volunteer to make the necessary repairs to the roof, but as usual no one stepped forward. It became clear that a new roof was needed after a while. Finally on May 28, 1865, one member motioned to build a new church with it passing twenty five for and two against. To help pay for the church, members were charged \$20.00 – half to be paid by the end of the year and the other half to be decided later. After discussion for a location, it was decided to build a solid brick church on the same site on N. Fourth St. The old church was sold to the Singing Society and moved, but they continued to worship there until the new church was built. Dedication was on Christmas Day 1866.

Women in 1867 were not able to vote for elected officials. The same went for church matters, but there was one woman who questioned whether she had the right to vote. Sophia Eitler approached the congregation with that question at the annual meeting on December 26. There is no record of discussion or whether there were others that asked as well. It was moved that she be given that right. Two years later a resolution was made concerning the unmarried women and widows. They clarified what these women can and can not do. “Resolved that such unmarried women and widows who pay all dues and assessments and meet all other requirements of a member of this congregation be given the right to vote but not the right to be



elected to office.”<sup>9</sup> It must have been assumed that married women would not vote because their husbands would serve as the representatives of the family. The women who did question this must have been only a few. By December 1873, the records show that only six women made use of this right to vote. This may not have been a big issue, but one that was open for discussion not thinking about church leadership or headship principles.

At this same time, the frequent occurrence of pastoral change was happening. On September 17, 1867 before this issue of women voting came up, Pastor Fack submitted his resignation. No reason is given, but the congregation refused by one vote. However his contract was voted not to be renewed in December. Because of a change in the constitution there was always to be three month notice of a pastoral resignation or the congregation releasing the pastor. So they had three months to find a pastor. Pastor John Boesch was chosen but a year later he turned in his resignation probably because he would receive a better salary at a congregation in Missouri. In July 1869 Pastor Johann Hoyer was elected.

The congregation and Pastor Hoyer did not always see eye to eye. They disagreed a lot it seems and it came to the point he was almost dismissed before the end of his contract. There is one event worth noting about his time with German Evangelical Church. While he was the pastor, he convinced the congregation to join the Society of the Free Evangelical Protestant Church of North America in 1870. They saw this joining to be good in many ways.

Whereas for some time now the opinion by a portion of the congregation and because of the assent of our preacher, that the joining of our congregation to the Society of the Free Evangelical Protestant Church of North America would be advantageous for congregation and preachers, yet it is also known by everyone that this bond works favorably for us physically and spiritually and that it renders a spiritual direction to the same, and whereas the knowledge of being spiritually united with thousands of people of the same convictions, and whereas confidence in the spreading, preservation and strength of rationally pure and wholesome

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<sup>9</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown* , January 16, 1869

Christianity awaken and strengthens and encourage emulation, be it thus resolved: that the church council in conjunction with the preacher of the congregation with the Free Evangelical Protestant Church of North America with the condition that by this union inroads into the independent rights of our congregation as stated in our constitution will in no way be made.<sup>10</sup>

The members saw many benefits to joining a synodical body both for their own spiritual lives and for the spread of the Gospel. It is disappointing to find out this time was brief. In that short time a delegate was sent to the 1871 convention in Cincinnati returning with a favorable report. All seemed to be going just as they initially thought it would, but the feelings soon changed. On February 22, 1872, the congregation voted to drop its membership with the society. The reason given is one often used to explain why something cannot be done or continued. "It was further resolved to leave the Protestant Association since it is too expensive for us to send delegates to the association (convention)."<sup>11</sup> An additional reason for this departure could be that Pastor Hoyer was no longer with the congregation. It was voted in September 1870 not to renew his contract. The man behind the original idea was gone so there might have been some lack of support. The congregation never joined a synodical body again until it became officially affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod.

The succeeding pastor did not fair too well with the congregation either. Pastor August Knus, one of the most liberal pastors in the congregation history, was chosen at the end of 1870. During his time a school house was built behind the church, but there seemed to be some interaction problems between pastor and congregation. An article appeared condemning and criticizing him for sponsoring a harvest festival even though he had permission from the congregation. Letters appeared in following papers defending him, but it was discovered later on that Pastor Hoyer, the former pastor, was one who had written the article.

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<sup>10</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, July 10, 1870

<sup>11</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, February 22, 1872

Everything seemed to go along smoothly until he wanted to resign in September 1872. When he handed his resignation in to the council, a member also handed in a complaint against him. The complaint was never explained. The council called on him to defend himself. The church minutes quote the written proclamation to Pastor Knus since the pastors did not attend church council meetings unless invited.

It is herewith declared to you that...an accusation against you was handed in to the church council and that in accordance with one of these adopted resolutions, for a defense against such accusations you are invited herewith to appear before the church council on the fifth of this month at 8:00 in the evening, at the home of Wilhelm Roeber, and that you are not to conduct any type of services or church functions until a decision of the matter has been made. You will therefore pay attention to the merits of this invitation and deliver to the church council the keys to the church and to the confirmation room until that time.<sup>12</sup>

Pastor Knus did come and defend himself. The council exonerated, the matter was dropped, and his resignation was accepted. Pastor Knus accepted a call to go to Eau Claire, but his farewell sermon was very pointed. He railed into the church council with malicious accusations and as a result every member of the church resigned. They felt unworthy to be representatives of the congregation especially because they were accused from the pulpit. In February the council members were asked to rescind their resignation because they were all honest men.

Pastor Knus' successor did not stay very long – a continuation of the same problem. He did not even stay a year. The next man changed that. Pastor Edward Knaak stayed from September 1873 until he handed in his resignation on August 20, 1884 which was initially rejected. All must have progressed smoothly except the usual, church finances. Pastor, organists, and custodians were often paid late, sometimes even being paid a year late.

The longevity the German Evangelical Church had with Pastor Knus was not to be followed with the same. Pastor Julius Koehler began his ministry in September 1885 only

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<sup>12</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, September 3, 1872

lasting until April ending with the congregation being swindled. It was report on April 11, 1886 that Pastor Koehler had disappeared the previous week with unpaid bills and borrowed money amounting to \$700.00. All of the bills and loans were in the congregation's name. The members were betrayed and probably felt foolish because Pastor Koehler had done all this to them. Because of this incident, the council was instructed to publish these scandalous dealings in newspapers to warn other congregations. On April 24, 1886, this is what appeared in *Weltburger*, a German periodical of the time.

Pursuant to a congregational resolution by the unattached Evangelical Protestant Congregation in Watertown the undersigned church council of this congregation makes know that it was duped more than six month ago with sugar-coated sermons to elect caused by perpetrated swindle a certain individual named Julius Koehler; that he, after six months of service to the congregation disappeared by night and fog without any apparent reason. . . However, it has now become evident since his disappearance that he absconded with nearly \$700 of borrowed money and other debts. This information is given so that other churches are warned about similar acts of swindle by him.<sup>13</sup>

The next few pastors followed the typical pattern of not staying long and having problems of varying kinds with the congregation.

Finally in 1890, there came some stability and a turn for this congregation. Pastor Hermann Sterz was elected as the new pastor that year. Before this time the congregation had thirteen pastors. From this point forward, a trend began of longevity and stability in the pulpit beginning with Pastor Sterz who served until 1926.<sup>14</sup> Pastor Sterz also began the process of slowly moving the congregation towards pure Lutheranism. He was a member of the Michigan Lutheran Synod at one time.

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<sup>13</sup> *Weltburger*, April 24, 1886

<sup>14</sup> From 1890 until the present day, the congregation has had only six full-time pastors and one part-time. Every pastor after Sterz would be pure Lutheran affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod.

His first official action resulted in a committee being formed to study an article in the church constitution which spoke about the annual election and voting for pastors. Five days later on January 1, 1891, the committee reported that this was not in agreement with God's Word and it is impractical and without purpose. They went on to report, "It could not lead to a blessing for the congregation but rather easily to its detriment."<sup>15</sup> This report was accepted and the constitution was changed. This was the first big step in stabilizing their congregation. No longer would there be as much turnover in the position of pastor. They began to understand the doctrine of the divine call a little better.

Pastor Sterz began to involve himself more in congregational matters. He attended meetings of the congregation which was different from before. Pastors never attended these meetings unless invited by the council. He must not have attended every meeting until 1897 when it began to be noted he was in attendance at all church council meetings. Things began to get done and were improved over the next few years. He suggested some changes to the church's constitution and these changes were adopted a month later.<sup>16</sup> The church building was improved with a new roof and a Round Oak furnace as just a couple of examples. It would seem that under Pastor Sterz's spiritual leadership the congregation was moving forward without incident.

In the first decade of the Twentieth Century, the Evangelical German (or Protestant) Church of Watertown would undergo a major change. In September 1909, Pastor Sterz suggested changing the name of the congregation to "Evangelical Lutheran Church". There was much discussion weighing the advantages and disadvantages because of the name change. The council decided it would be good to change their name except one member, Samuel

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<sup>15</sup> *Minutes of Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, January 1, 1891

<sup>16</sup> The minutes do not record what was changed in the constitution.

Kuenzi, who asked for more time to think about it, but before the matter was brought before the rest of the congregation he announced he was leaving the church. The following month, the issue was presented before the congregation with a petition signed by seventy members. The petition was accepted and unanimously adopted. The petition and declaration reads as follows:

We, the undersigned members of the Evangelical Protestant Congregation of Watertown, WI, declare herewith that it is our wish and desire, and we approve of it by vote, that the name of our congregation be changed to Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, and we ask that this petition of the congregation be placed before the congregation in a special meeting and make the change, and to make sure that this name change is legally correct. However this declaration in no way must be looked upon or interpreted in such a way that the congregation is joining any synod.<sup>17</sup>

The council was given permission to make the appropriate change. In the council meeting at the end of the month, it was motioned to actually take the name "Evangelical Lutheran St. Luke Congregation"<sup>18</sup>. The proper changes were made with the state and county as well as the change made to the constitution.

An even bigger step was taken toward confessional Lutheranism in 1911. On January 29, the council and pastor of St. Mark's invited the council and pastor of St. Luke's to a joint meeting. The invitation was accepted. The meeting was held the following evening. In this meeting, they would discuss the release and acceptance of members from one congregation to another. It was resolved that the general rule of the Synodical Conference regarding releases and transfers from sister congregations. Members from these congregations would be accepted into membership only if they were released in good standing. Some sense of fellowship had been established between St. Mark's, a member of the Wisconsin Synod, and St. Luke's congregation.

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes of the Evangelical German Church of Watertown*, October 3, 1909

<sup>18</sup> This name was again officially changed in 1942 to "St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church."

St. Luke's for a few years seemed to go about with business as usual, but in 1917, there was a worship need. The hymnals they had been using were falling apart. These days the easiest solution to that problem would be to replace them, but that was not so easy. Those hymnals were no longer in print. To solve this problem, Pastor Sterz suggested that they use the Wisconsin Synod German hymnal. The congregation approved.<sup>19</sup> Life in the congregation again moved along for ten more years without much incident.

At the end of 1926, sadness came to the congregation. On November 27, Pastor Sterz died after suffering for eight weeks. He was laid to rest on December 1. It was noted in the minutes of the next congregational meeting in January, the Sterz family was thanked for the many years of faithful service. The minutes go on to say, "Since it has pleased God, the Lord of life and death, to take our pastor, Mr. Sterz, from our midst, it would be necessary for the congregation which was served during his illness and death of Pastor Sterz by Pastor Stern of Columbus to look for another caretaker of souls. The first pastor to receive the call returned it. Pastor Paul Lorenz then received the call and accepted it.

After World War I, many German congregations began to face similar issues. They all worshipped in German, but this was beginning to change. St. Luke's was no different than any other German congregation. When this issue arose in 1927, there were two different decisions made. In May it was decided that the pastor preach in German and English even though a majority of the members preferred German. This lasted until January 1928 when it was decided that first and third Sundays would be in German while second and fourth Sundays would be in English. If there happened to be a fifth Sunday in a month the language of that day would be German. Whenever it was a festival day, the pastor was free to decide which language to use. German services over the next few decades would slowly fade away. The last one is not

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<sup>19</sup> In 1941, they decided to purchase The Lutheran Hymnal. The orders of service were not used until 1944

recorded, but in 1958 any German services were to be arranged by the pastor and those who would attend.

Sometimes it seems that the life of a congregation is a repeating record. In the case of St. Luke's the issue that repeats itself is finances and especially the pastor's salary. In late 1940 Pastor Lorenz felt the congregation owed him \$1,000.00 back pay, but the congregation felt otherwise. A mediator was called in to mediate the discussion in a special meeting. He is referred to as the "Conference Visitor". Not many people attended the meeting so the council members were to contact each family for their opinion on the issue. They would meet again two weeks later. This time the Conference Visitor was not the only visitor, but also the president of the Western Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod. This is interesting because they are still not a member of the synod. These two pastors encouraged the congregation to pay some of Pastor Lorenz's salary that was due him. The opinion of the congregation was unanimous to reject the request. The council followed with the suggestion of paying \$382.00 of the requested amount which was what the church records showed he was owed. Then a surprising solution came. It was suggested to terminate Pastor Lorenz's call at the end of the month, but after discussion this motion was dropped provided that he resigns. He had until November 1, less than a month, to leave the parsonage and he would receive his salary through the month of October.

To replace Pastor Lorenz, call meetings were held under the supervision of the district president. After several pastors returned the call, Pastor Immanuel Uetzmann accepted the call in 1941. He served the congregation for thirty years. During his time at St. Luke's a new church building was built, led the congregation into the Wisconsin Synod (both of which will be discussed), and church membership grew.



After more years of “business as usual”, another issue was coming forward in October 1952. This concern was really about the size and condition of the building. There was insufficient space. At that time the congregation had 400 communicant members and 600 souls. There were also some other concerns. The plumbing and heating systems needed a lot of work. There was no fire escape for the balcony and the church basement could only be entered from the outside. So in January 1953, the building committee was to start collecting funds in the hopes to start the building on what seemed to be the existing church the following year. They wanted to extend to the north wall as far as they could, but they did not do that. There was talk about constructing a new building. So they proposed the sale of the property to the city for \$80,000.00. Apparently the city did not accept their offer. The decision was made in July 1954 to stay where they were and go ahead with the previous remodeling ideas. However all bids were rejected. In a special meeting on November 21, the council was asked to report on possible ways they could meet their needs for Sunday School and the new furnace with the least possible expense and report on a possible cost for a new church building. When the council came back with their report in January 1955, the fact was made clear to the congregation. A motion was made to build a new church and the congregation agreed. The council would be responsible to look for possible sites for the new church and eventually the site where they had been for a hundred years was sold to the city for \$25,000.00<sup>20</sup>.

The original site for the new church would be on Utah St. on the south side of Watertown. They were going to build there and plans were made to start building in the spring of 1957. This did not take happen for some reason. In August 1958 the location where the new church would be built was to be staked out so that the congregation could meet there. However concern arose because the city of Watertown decided to reroute Highway 26 at the property. So

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<sup>20</sup> The city of Watertown converted the old site on N. Fourth St. into a parking lot.

the congregation decided to build at the corner of S. Third St. and Clark St where the church stands today. Construction began in 1959. The *Watertown Daily Times* reported:

St. Luke's Lutheran Church, North Fourth Street, of which the Rev. I.G. Uetzmann is pastor, will break ground for its new church edifice on Sunday. The new church will be erected at the corner of South Third and Clark Streets in the city's Seventh Ward. Services marking the occasion will be held in the church Sunday morning at 8 and 10 o'clock. The actual ceremony of breaking ground will take place on the site of the new church in the Seventh Ward at 11:15 a.m., following the 10 a.m. service at the church.<sup>21</sup>

The new church was dedicated on May 22, 1960 with a whole day of festivities. There was a dedication service in the morning, along with a festival service in the afternoon, and an evening vespers service.

Two important things should be noted about the dedication services. A caption under a picture of the inside of the new church in the service folder reads a strongly Confessional Lutheran statement. It reads, "We preach Christ and him crucified" all in capital letters. The other interesting note about this service was the preacher. Professor F.E. Blume, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary preached the dedication sermon at the morning service. Under his name in the service folder, they say he is from, "Our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Thiensville, Wisconsin." Relations between St. Luke's and the Wisconsin Synod were very close setting the table for the day when the congregation would officially become a member of the Wisconsin Synod.

St. Luke's, as it has been seen, has thought about joining a synodical body and even did it once for a very short time. This was not a new concept, but the proposition of joining the Wisconsin Synod never came up until 1951 even though they were talking with and becoming closer to the synod for many years. When it was first suggested in 1951, it was decided to put it

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<sup>21</sup> *Watertown Daily Times*, April 13, 1959, accessed December 3, 2010, <http://www.watertownhistory.org/Articles/StLukes.htm>

on the agenda for the congregational meeting in October. The discussion in that meeting was put off until January and then if the congregation wished to talk about then they would do so. In that meeting, the vote was pushed off until the next annual meeting. Nothing ever got done probably because of the building issues that took the congregation's attention. Finally after the new church was dedicated and things returned to normal, the final steps were taken. St. Luke's had a girl's club. In April of 1965 this club joined the WELS Girl Pioneers. Then one year later, the last step was taken. On April 5, 1966<sup>22</sup>, the congregation resolved to join the Wisconsin Synod. When this decision was made there were some dissenting votes, but the majority wanted to join. St. Luke's had finally found a home in Confessional Lutheranism in the Wisconsin Synod.

God certainly has blessed St. Luke's Lutheran Church for more than 150 years. He continues to bless the congregation today. He has blessed them with a joint school operation with Trinity, a school building attached to the church, growth in membership to what is today around 1,000 total members, and in many other ways. It may have taken the St. Luke's congregation a long time to actually join a church body. The road along the way at times was very rocky where it might have been hard to continue as a congregation, but God allowed them to continue by his grace to serve him in Watertown. When the day came to join the Wisconsin Synod, there might not have been total agreement, but today St. Luke's congregation does not look back. They only look forward to continue preach Christ and him crucified to the community of Watertown, Wisconsin.

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<sup>22</sup> The Watertown Historical Society has the date of joining the Wisconsin Synod wrong. According to them, St. Luke's joined the WELS in 1909 after they renamed the church.

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