

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

Newburg, Wisconsin



A Historical Overview from 1884 to 1934

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Beginning in 1846, German Lutheran immigrants began settling in the Newburg area. The earliest beginnings of St. John's congregation can be traced back to 1850. Remember that at this time the Lutheran Church was still in its infancy at this time in Wisconsin. Our own Wisconsin Synod was just getting started at this time. Lutheran pastors were a scarce commodity in Wisconsin in 1850, and so there were not enough men and means to serve the many and scattered Lutheran settlers with the Word and Sacrament. But there were Reformed pastors in the area who were willing to serve the Lutheran settlers and win them over to the Reformed camp. These false preachers were able to mislead some of the settlers away from their Lutheran faith, but others remained steadfast to the Lord and his Word.¹

Those who would eventually found St. John's called on pastors from Milwaukee so that they would not be without the Word and Sacraments entirely. Since the pastors were at some distance, they could only visit the Lutheran settlers in the Newburg area occasionally. One group met at the home of Michael Geidel in Farmington and was served by Pastor Kluegel, while another group met in the schoolhouse of Newburg and was served by Pastor Dietrich.

The birth of St. John's congregation and its first 25 years of existence have been written about in another Church History paper, therefore I have decided to cover the next 50 years of that congregation. I will begin with the 25th year of this congregation and the pastor who was serving at that time.

PASTOR EDUARD HOYER, 1883-1904

In the fall of 1883, the previous pastor (Pastor Ernst Mayerhoff)¹ received and accepted a call to Forest, Wisconsin, near Fond du Lac. St. John's in West Bend had called Pastor Hoyer, who had been pastor of St. Paul's in Platteville, WI. St. John's in Newburg then proceeded to

¹ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934, p. 3.

call Pastor Hoyer to serve them as well as the congregation in West Bend. He accepted and was installed by his predecessor on the 24th Sunday after Trinity, 1883.

A NEW SCHOOLHOUSE

Up until Pastor Hoyer arrived, the church's confirmation classes had been taught in the church. Only on two occasions was that not the case, when Herman Koenig and Dietrich Poggenburg offered their homes as place where the classes could be held instead of the church. It was resolved in a congregational meeting held on January 8, 1884, that next summer a new school should be built. A committee to accomplish this was set up to visit the members in order to gather a building fund, and when enough capital was on hand to start building.² In 1884 a schoolhouse was completed by that fall for confirmation instruction and Sunday School. It cost the congregation \$219.88 to built this, its first school. The following three years, school was taught in July and August in the German language by students from our colleges.³ On January 12, 1886, for the first time, the congregational meeting took place in the new schoolhouse.

25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

In the meeting of January 11, 1887, Pastor Hoyer reminded the congregation that the 25th anniversary of the church being dedicated was coming up in August. Pastor proposed that the congregation celebrate it sometime during that month. To get ready for this celebration the church building was to be restored where necessary and a new roof was to be made. The woodwork was to be freshly varnished, and a new point was to be placed on the church steeple.⁴

Three of the young women of the congregation were asked to collect money for the church decorations. They conducted an every-house visit in their assigned districts. They collected at total of \$54.00. This money was given to Pastor. In Milwaukee he purchased a

² St. John's Congregation Meeting Minutes, 8 Jan., 1884.

³ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934. p. 9.

⁴ St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes, 11 Jan., 1887.

decorative cross for the top of the steeple for \$25.00, two alter candleholders, a flagon for Holy Communion, and shades for all the church windows.⁵

On Saturday, August 13, the celebration of the 25 years of the church building began with decorating the inside of the church. Student Plocher, the college student from Watertown who taught in the summer, and the young women of the congregation helped in this process.

Pastor Hoyer had invited both Pastors Gausewitz, who served St. John's for five years, and Pastor Mayerhoff, who served St. John's for twelve years, to preach for this festive occasion. Pastor Gausewitz preached for the morning service and Pastor Mayerhoff preached for the afternoon service. St. John's in West Bend showed their thanks by sending their teacher and choir singers for the occasion. They would join with choir that student Plocher had gathered together for the Jubilee services.

On the Jubilee Sunday the congregation and guests filled the church. After the morning service the people made their way over to the schoolhouse where the ladies had set up tables. So many people were present that the tables had to be set three times. The young women got advice from their mothers as to how much food to prepare for the large crowd that they had expected. Even though they did have to set the tables three times, some food was left over because the weather was very rainy. Many people could not attend because of the weather. After the dinner was over the afternoon service began. Everyone gathered in the church again. After the jubilee service came to an end, supper was served in the schoolhouse. After the meal, the pastors and guest left for home. The members sat down at the tables and enjoyed the desserts and other food that remained. They stayed as long as they liked.⁶

⁵ Congregational Meeting Minutes, 10 Oct., 1887.

⁶ Congregational Meeting Minutes, 11 Nov., 1887.

Now, I will share with you, what I feel are some “interesting” happenings recorded in the minutes:

After the close of the church service on July 10, 1892, Pastor Hoyer asked the members to remain and announced that he had received a Divine Call to the congregation in Two Rivers. The congregation asked him not to leave even though he would have received a salary increase of \$100.00 per year. At that meeting the congregation expressed much satisfaction with the pastor and his sermons. It was therefore decided to raise his annual salary to \$250.00, and to give him \$25.00 extra for the remaining half year. It is then recorded in the minutes that Pastor announced that he would not accept the Call to Two Rivers.⁷

At the meeting on January 10, 1893, it was reported that at the last wedding in church, a choral society sang for the bride one selection in English, which was not suitable for church. The minutes simply say, “It was then decided that this must not happen again.”⁸

At that same meeting Pastor Hoyer was authorized to write a letter to Ferdinand Hinze, who left the congregation, informing him that he still owes the church treasury \$1.80. In the next meeting, which was held on February 6, 1894, it was stated, “the \$1.80 which the miserly Hinze in Augustin owes to the treasury was written off the records.”

CHURCH RENOVATION

At a Special Congregation Meeting held on May 21, 1899, the congregation resolved to build an alter niche with a sacristy on the south end of the church. At another Special Congregational Meeting, this one held on June 11, 1899, it was resolved that the building of the niche and the sacristy should not be carried out because the church was too old. They decided that a new church should be built. The Church Council was instructed to seek pledges from the

⁷ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 10 July, 1892.

⁸ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 10 Jan., 1893.

members for this new church, so that within the year a new church could be constructed. After Pastor Hoyer reported on the progress of the building project at the January 16, 1900 Congregational Meeting, it was then resolved that the decision made on June 11 to build a new church should be retracted and considered invalid. At a Special Meeting on May 6, 1900, the members decided to gather \$600 to make necessary improvements in the present church. In this renovation a new floor was laid, a new vestry, alter, and pulpit were built, and twenty-three new pews were purchased. Later in 1902 the roof of the church was renewed.⁹

SELF-SUPPORTING STATUS

At the congregational meeting of January 6, 1903 some of the members expressed the desire to become a self-supporting congregation and to have their own pastor. This topic was thoroughly discussed. When the vote was called 14 were in favor of self-supporting status, while 15 were opposed to it.¹⁰

In the meeting of January 1904, a committee consisting of John R, Laubenstein, William Plenzke, and Fred Erler, was appointed to canvass the congregation. They were to find out whether the members were willing to raise their dues so that a yearly salary of \$500.00 would be assured so that St. John's would be able to have its own pastor. On March 1, the committee reported that the required amount has been pledged. Pastor Hoyer declared the congregation to be self-supporting and resigned as its pastor. He also nominated two candidates. The call went out to and was accepted by William C. Mahnke, a graduate of the seminary in Wauwatosa, WI.

⁹ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934. p. 10-11

¹⁰ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 6 Jan., 1903.

At this meeting, Pastor Hoyer also recommended several paragraphs to be added to the constitution, relating to the school, admittance of new members, announcements for communion, and meeting of the church council, all of which were accepted by the congregation.¹¹

During the summer months the congregation seized the opportunity to purchase land that was adjoining to the church's property. For \$850.00 they bought the lot and the house lying southeast of the church property and adjacent to it. This was the ideal location for a parsonage.

PASTOR WILLIAM C. MAHNKE, 1904-1916

Pastor William C. Mahnke was installed as pastor of St. John's on July 24, 1904. Through the efforts of Pastor Hoyer, the call to Pastor Mahnke included teaching school from October to Palm Sunday four days of the week. But in the fall, Pastor Mahnke opened and taught a full-time Christian day school from September to May.¹² He conducted classes five days a week in the German and English languages. From the beginning the attendance was very good. The second year 54 students were packed into a room 18' x 24'.¹³ Mr. Paul Krueger gave a report at the February 4, 1906 meeting on the need for building a new school. Possibilities laid out before the congregation were to use the old building and enlarge it at a cost of \$697.05, or to build a new frame building(24' x 36'), which would cost \$777.05, or a brick building of the same size which would cost only 72.55 more. The congregation decided to build the new 24' x 36' school. It was also resolved that the old school be sold. At the April 1, 1906 meeting it was decided that the resolution to sell the old school should not be carried out. Instead, the old schoolhouse was to be attached to the parsonage.

¹¹ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934. p. 11

¹² *ibid.* p. 18

¹³ *ibid.* p. 11

The building was completed and dedicated in August. The sermons on that day both stressed the necessity and the blessing of a Christian training for the children. The cost of the schoolhouse was approximately \$1,000.00.¹⁴

Later that same month, a question came up concerning baptismal sponsors. At the April 29, 1906 meeting, Pastor Mahnke asked the congregation if his handling of the matter met with their approval. A member wished to have as a baptismal sponsor for his child a member of a neighboring congregation which was not united with the congregation. The pastor asked for a decision on this matter on the following Sunday.¹⁵

Professor J. Koehler from Wauwatosa was consulted on this matter and he was asked for help. He stated that among good Lutherans, only a Lutheran person can be a baptismal sponsor. Only those who hold the same beliefs as we do should be baptismal sponsors. While it is best to have sponsors who are firmly set in the Lutheran faith, it is not wrong under some circumstances to have someone who is not a member as long as he is a believer and acknowledges the Word and Sacraments. The Professor also commented on a question saying that a Reformed Christian who believes in the Lord Jesus may serve as a baptismal sponsor and this should not disturb people. But a Lutheran pastor should stand firmly and give attention to the Lutheran constitution. Making such a change in practice should not become the rule.¹⁶

What follows is another interesting side-note taken from the meeting minutes. At the January 5, 1909 meeting it was resolved that because Mr. Frank Erler had been told many times to withdraw his lodge membership, and had not done so, and because Pastor Mahnke and the chairman had admonished him and invited him to come to congregational meeting to answer for his action and he had not done so, the congregation decided to give him one more year to think

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.12.

¹⁵ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 1 April, 1906.

¹⁶ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 13 May, 1906.

the matter over. During that time the pastor and the chairman were to continue to admonish him in an effort to win him back to the congregation. If he did not leave the lodge he was to appear at the next annual congregational meeting.

At that next congregational meeting Mr. Erler was unanimously requested by the congregation to leave his lodge membership, but he asked the congregation for two more weeks time to think this matter over and then he would give his answer. At a January 16, 1910 meeting the congregation congratulated Mr. Frank Erler on his decision to leave the lodge and requested that he always remain faithful to St. John's.

We would have prayed that was the end of the story. However, five years later, on January 11, 1915, the congregation decided that since Mr. Frank Erler did not keep his promise to end his membership in the lodge and he no longer came to Word and Sacrament, he was regarded as no longer a member by self-exclusion.¹⁷

50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGREGATION

On April 18, 1909, St. John's celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. Pastors Mayerhoff and Hoyer delivered the German sermons and Pastor Gausewitz the English sermon. At its 50th anniversary the congregation numbered 73 voting members and fifteen women and was free of debt. Two of the founding fathers, Jacob Bloecher, Sr., and Traugott Seidemann, lived to enjoy this day.¹⁸

NEW PARSONAGE

At a September 7, 1913, Special Congregational Meeting it was decided to build a new parsonage. The meeting also made mention that the construction of the parsonage was to be of wood (A decision the congregation would regret as this parsonage would burn down in 1943).

¹⁷ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 11 Jan., 1915.

¹⁸ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934. p. 12-13.

Mr. Roever offered that the pastor could stay with him at his house during the building of the parsonage at no cost to the congregation. The new parsonage was built in 1914 on the site of the old one. It was a spacious, eight-room, two story house, with a kitchen annex, and was provided with hot water heating. This new parsonage cost \$3,164.00 to build.¹⁹

At a special meeting on September 3, 1916, the Call that Pastor Mahnke had received from the church in Kirchhayn was read again. It was then resolved by unanimous decision that St. John's wanted to keep Pastor Mahnke, not wanting him to move to Kirchhayn. On October 1, 1916, Pastor Mahnke read his Call letter from Root Creek. The congregation granted Pastor William Mahnke a peaceful release so that he could accept the call to Root Creek. St. John's then proceeded to call Pastor Arthur Berg from Bay City to be there next pastor. He would return that call.²⁰ On October 15, 1916 the congregation called Pastor Toepel to be pastor and Pastor Hoyer to be vacancy pastor. Pastor Toepel would also return his call. Then, on October 22, 1916 St. John's called Pastor Adam Petermann.

PASTOR ADAM PETERMANN, 1916-1942

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Pastor Petermann, of St. John's congregation near Covert, MI, accepted the call to serve as pastor at St. John's Newberg, WI., and was installed by Pastor Mahnke on December 3, 1916.

Pastor Adam Petermann was born February 1, 1887, in Brown County, Minnesota, and was baptized by the Rev. Deuber. He attended St. John's Lutheran School of Sleepy Eye, MN and was instructed and confirmed by Professor August Zich, who was the pastor at Sleepy Eye at that time. Having been encourage and strengthened in his desire to serve the Lord in his Kingdom as a preacher, he entered Dr. Martin Luther College soon after his confirmation and

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁰ Cong. Meeting Minutes, 3 Sept. & 1 Oct., 1916.

later continued his studies at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI, graduating there with the class of 1909. Three years later he graduated from our Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, WI. Having been called to serve a mission congregation near Covert, Michigan, he was ordained by his pastor, Rev. Wm. Albrecht, and on Sept 8, 1912, he was installed as pastor of the mission congregation at Covert, Michigan by Pastor H.C. Haase. He served that congregation four years before coming to Newburg.²¹

ENGLISH SERVICES

One especially notable thing that happened during the time Pastor Petermann served at St. John's was that English services started at St. John's. Up until 1924 the services of the congregation had been conducted in the German language only. In July of that year, English services were introduced for those who desired them. They were held on the third Sunday of each month. A few years later, they would also be held on the fifth Sunday of the month, when it occurs, as well as the evening of the second day of the three main church holidays.²²

THE NEW CHURCH

In 1926, the church that still stands today (May of 2001), was built. The last service in the old church was conducted on July 11, 1926. On August 29, the cornerstone was laid. Services were held in the afternoon under the shady trees between the parsonage and church site. Pastor C. Gausewitz, son of the former pastor to St. John's, preached in German to a large audience. The new church was dedicated on December 19, 1926. Pastors Hoyer (morning) and Mahnke (afternoon) preached in German, and Professor Meyer preached in English that evening. The total cost of the church was \$20,925.00. The old alter and pulpit were retained with only

²¹ "My Father – The Pastor in the St. John's Herald, May 1984.

²² History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Fifth-fifth Jubilee, 1934. p. 13-14.

minor changes. No new furniture was bought except twenty-four new pews from Northwestern Publishing House.²³

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGREGATION

The 75th Anniversary of the congregation was observed on June 24, 1934. Pastor Mahnke preached in German during the morning service, while Pastor William Hartwig of Montello, the first son the of congregation to go into the pastoral ministry, preached for the English afternoon service. A choir was hurriedly gathered at the end of May to sing for the Anniversary services. The first rehearsal was on May 30 under the direction of Teacher Arnold J. Lober. After Mr. Lober left for home on June 5, Pastor Petermann directed the choir. Rehearsing two and three times a week, the choir was able to render fairly well two songs for the Jubilee. One song for the German service and "Lord, Thy Glory Fills the Heaven" #55 in "Luther League Hymnal."

In 1934 Pastor Petermann wrote concerning this Jubilee celebration: "We are celebrating our Diamond Jubilee in times of which we are inclined to say, 'I have no pleasure in them.' That these times are a chastisement of the Lord because we have become lukewarm in our love towards him, should be evident to every thinking Christian. We have neglected the Lord's business. He is earnestly calling us to repentance. Let us heed his call."²⁴

The country was still in the midst of the Great Depression when Pastor Petermann penned those words. Despite the efforts of President Roosevelt, there were still millions of people out of work. The people of St. John's Newberg were not spared from this disaster. There was no money to be had and so the congregation had difficulty paying off the debt on the new church and often times the minister's salary could not be met. At one time in one of his sermons, Pastor

²³ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934, p. 12-13

²⁴ History of the St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation: Seventy-fifth Jubilee, 1934, p. 19.

Petermann, knowing that there was no money, asked the members for food. The people responded whole-heartedly, giving of things from their gardens and farms.²⁵

At the time of its 75th anniversary, the membership of St. John's church numbered 309 souls. Of these 85 are voting members, 22 others are women. The total number of communicants is 222. Up until April 2, 1934, there had been a total of 803 baptisms, 636 confirmations, 162 marriages, and 295 burials.

The first baptism on record since the organization of the congregation was that of Henry, son of Jost Gerlach, on Sept 15, 1959. The first confirmation class consisted of Henrietta and Emma Bruns on April 6, 1860. Julius Kratzsch and Eva Ahner were the first couple to be married in the church; the date was March 17, 1864. The first funeral service on record was on July 21, 1861, for Sophia Kratzsch, wife of Herman Kratzsch, who died at the age of 30 years.²⁶

This concludes the historical overview of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Newburg, WI from 1884-1934. Certainly the Lord has blessed this congregation and we are confident that he will continue to shower St. John's with blessing upon blessing and grace upon grace.

**“Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good.
His love endures forever!”**

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

²⁵ “My Father – The Pastor in the St. John's Herald, May 1984.

²⁶ Newspaper clip from 1934.

Bibliography

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