

Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church:



A Story of Firsts

David J. Karow
Senior Church History
Professor Brenner
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The year 1994 saw the Green Bay Packers finally moving in the right direction. The year was a sight to see for a team that had seen nothing but hard times since its glory days in the 60's. As the season progressed the Packers were making believers out of many people. Their hard work and determination, their expectation and preparation finally came to its fruition as millions of people watched as the "Pack" took the Lombardi trophy home to Green Bay with the Superbowl XXXI victory in New Orleans in 1997. It seemed that everyone around the state and the country was now really taking notice of the small northern Wisconsin town.

People in Green Bay were taking notice, that is, more than their usual great notice of the Packers. So much so that very few people realized what was happening on the other side of town. On the southeast side of Green Bay work was being done that had the one goal of making believers of all people - in their Savior Jesus Christ.

The story of Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church did not start in a very promising way. In the 1977-78 area Doug Voigt, whose father had been pastor of St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church in Green Bay, went to the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod's Board for Home Missions with a proposal to start a mission on Green Bay's southeast side in Bellevue. Mr. Voigt, who was Bellevue town clerk at the time, saw the growth potential in the town and saw an opportunity for the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod to start work. The Board for Home Missions went to Bellevue and held a meeting to investigate the possibilities. Three area congregations were invited to this meeting: First Ev. Lutheran, St. Mark Ev. Lutheran and St. Paul Ev. Lutheran, all of Green Bay. The Board for Home Missions was willing to look into the proposal if the pastors of the area congregations unanimously supported it. One pastor, Rev. Christman of St. Paul, didn't see the need for a mission in Bellevue, so the proposal was rejected. So went the first attempt in Bellevue.

In 1988 the Board for Home Missions had tentatively targeted the “corners” of Green Bay as a mission effort. The SW corner of Green Bay got first priority and a mission was started there. That mission now stands as Beautiful Savior Ev. Lutheran Church. In the early nineties the Board for Home Missions faced a tightening in its budget, and Bellevue again sank in priority. The mission seemed to be put on the back burner as synodical attention was turned to the amalgamation question. It wasn't until August of 1992 that anything official began to happen in Bellevue.¹ In the months leading up to August a proposal was made to the Board for Home Missions by the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board which stated,

It was moved and supported that the Board for Home Missions be approached in September with a request for resources and manpower to serve the parish of Henrysville, North East Green Bay, and the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay Campus. The motion was passed.²

This was the beginning of the initial organized effort toward starting a new Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod church on Green Bay's east side. The Bellevue area looked promising to the District Mission Board because of a tremendous growth rate in the township. In the span between 1988 and 1989 Bellevue experienced the third highest growth rate in the state of Wisconsin. The Board for Home Missions realized that even with that rate Bellevue was only about one third developed, so the population growth could continue for at least twenty years. Another great reason to start a mission in Bellevue was that there were no other churches in the town. There was also a good representation of Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod members living in and around Bellevue who could become a good core group for the fledgling congregation. Bellevue also seemed to be in a good position to help with

¹Letter to the author from Rev. Steve Sauer.

²*Partners in Starting a Church in Bellevue*, District Mission Board letter sent out to organize a regional task force.

the campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay which suffered from the lack of a pastor with time to do work on campus.³

With this open window of opportunity the Board for Home Missions enlisted the help of a task force made up of Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod members and pastors in the neighboring churches. The task force was made up of a total of twenty-one men from six area congregations. Those congregations which were represented were Christ in Denmark, Emanuel in Henrysville, First, St. Paul, St. Mark and Beautiful Savior all of Green Bay. The panel was made up of thirteen lay men and eight pastors including the chairman, Pastor Keith Bilitz, and District Mission Board chairman Pastor David Pagel.

The first meeting of the task force took place on November 5, 1992 at St. Paul in Green Bay. This meeting really addressed the heart and core of what the mission to Bellevue would entail. A community profile of Bellevue was given as well as options for the kind of strategy to use in this field. The options given were to do absolutely nothing in Bellevue, relocate a Green Bay church to Bellevue, keep the status quo with Bellevue residents going to Green Bay for church, do some initial work and then call a pastor, or survey with the intent of calling a pastor. The minutes of this meeting indicate that the consensus of the group was that a pastor should be called who "would assume responsibility for leadership in the mission's development."⁴

In that meeting the decision was made not to include campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay in the primary focus of the mission congregation. The task force saw the

³Board for Home Missions Basic Information and Request form for Bellevue, WI dated January 12, 1993.

⁴Bellevue Mission Task Force meeting minutes from November 5, 1992.

campus ministry as important, but not a number one priority.

A final decision made in this meeting was that the participation of Emanuel - Henrysville would be seen as favorable, but the congregation would have to decide which pastor they wanted to be served by. For many years Emanuel had been served by the pastor of Christ in Denmark as a dual parish. At that time the pastor at Christ was Pastor Bilitz who was chairing the task force. Emanuel would have to decide what they wanted to do.

The next task force meeting was held on March 29, 1993 at St. Paul in Green Bay. Before this meeting took place Pastor Bilitz and other task force members did some work and came up with possible places for initial services and information about the number of Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod members in Bellevue. Mr. Voigt, now an assistant president at Denmark State Bank in Bellevue, had been able to offer the use of the bank's basement for services and meetings. Pastor Bilitz had been able to find that there were roughly 125 Wisconsin Synod families in Bellevue consisting of 236 communicants and 326 souls. With this information in hand the task force met on March 29.

The next meeting showed much progress in the mission effort. By the time of this meeting Emanuel - Henrysville had decided to take an active part in the work of the mission by breaking its seventy-five year tie to Christ - Denmark and starting a new dual parish relationship with the mission church. The pastor of the mission would now be serving both churches; Emanuel would help support the mission congregation and its pastor. Pastor Pagel related to the task force the terms of the agreement that Emanuel had made with the District Mission Board. The agreement signed by the council of Emanuel showed agreement with the District Mission Board on six points. Emanuel agreed to assist the District Mission Board in starting the mission, to jointly call a pastor to serve

Emanuel and the mission, to assist financially according to the ability, to assist the pastor with mission outreach in Henrysville as well as Bellevue, to pray for, work with and encourage the pastor and his family, and lastly to coordinate the affairs of the two churches to provide the maximum ministry for each congregation.⁵

The March 29 meeting also saw much discussion regarding the support for the proposed mission congregation. The concern was raised that the area churches support the mission in whatever way they could. It appears that this was not taken for granted. A short time previous to this, Beautiful Savior on the west side of Green Bay had gotten its start as a mission, and it appears there was some resentment among some people. There was a fear of the same thing happening on the east side of town. The church council of St. Paul congregation was a little hesitant to sign the "Resolution Concerning a WELS Mission in Bellevue, Wisconsin." However at this meeting the members of St. Paul on the task force, Gene Burmeister, Doug Voigt and Pastors Rose and Schoeneck, indicated that this resolution would again be considered at their April council meeting. This resolution was signed at that meeting.) ?

The task force and the District Mission Board agreed that there would be no canvassing done in Bellevue until a pastor was called and was on site. This necessitated a call. Therefore, "a meeting to call a pastor to serve the mission was scheduled for Tuesday, May 11, 1993 at Emanuel, Henrysville at 7:30 PM. Pastor Pagel will secure a call list from President Voss (Carl Voss, Northern WI district president of the Wisconsin Synod)."⁶ That call meeting was the first of five meetings to

⁵The six points of agreement listed in *An Agreement between Emanuel Ev. Lutheran Church, Henrysville, Wisconsin and the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board*

⁶Minutes from the Bellevue mission task force meeting, March 29, 1993.

call a pastor. Pastor Michael Spaude was the first to receive the call and return it. Over the next months there were four more call meetings and calls extended. The second call was sent in a meeting held on June 22 to Rev. Theodore Lambert, who sent it back. The third pastor to return the call was Rev. Joel Rakos, who was called on August 22. Another call meeting held October 7 called John Ruege, Jr, who was the last to return the call. On November 22, 1993 the final call was extended to Rev. Steve Sauer, who was associate pastor at Martin Luther Ev. Lutheran Church in Oshkosh, WI.⁷ Rev. Sauer accepted the call at the end of January in 1994.

On February 1, 1994 Pastor Keith Bilitz wrote a letter to the area pastors announcing Sauer's acceptance of the call and his installation date of February 13, 1994. Pastor Sauer, his wife Tina, and children Sarah, Alyssa, Brian, and Laura moved into their new parsonage at 2286 Collier Ct. on February 1, 1994. On February 13, Pastor Sauer's installation took place at Emanuel in their 8:00 AM service. He was commissioned as a missionary in Bellevue at 3:30 PM in a service at St. Paul. Pastor Sauer's father, Joel, preached the sermon in both services.

The district's mission counselor, Rev. Wayne Schulz, addressed a letter to Rev. Sauer on February 28. In that letter he outlined several points which needed to be accomplished. Some of the more important were: thinking about the long and short range plans for ministry, working on a name and logo for the outreach effort, planning materials for canvasses and mailings, planning a foot and phone canvass to get the word out about the mission, and the need to get a newcomer's list to help in establishing a prospect list. The points were addressed in the immediate future.⁸

On March 3 the Bellevue task force met with Pastor Sauer and discussed ideas for starting

⁷Call information from Doug Voigt.

⁸Letter from Pastor W. Schulz to Rev. Sauer.

the mission, the mission's nucleus, and the task force's involvement. One of the major accomplishments of this meeting was that all Green Bay area churches were "encouraged to invite Rev. Sauer to preach and/or present a message and invite current members to join and support the mission effort."⁹ These congregational visits and presentations were made in an effort to involve the neighboring congregations and let them know what was going on. They also helped to promote good will to avoid the perception that the mission was stealing members from the established congregations.

One of the first official acts in the mission's history with Sauer at the helm was to send flyers to all Bellevue residents on March 14. This flyer announced an open forum about the mission. This open forum was held on March 22 at 7:00 PM in the lower level of the Denmark State Bank. Twenty-five residents of Bellevue were in attendance. This open forum sought to answer many of the questions the people of Bellevue might have about "the new guy in town." Rev. Sauer introduced himself and the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod as the church body that sent him into the community. He addressed the reason why the mission was being started. The message of the Gospel is a message for all people of every town in the world. A quote from Bellevue town administrator Ron Umentum summed up why Bellevue was a good choice. "Finally, someone realized there are no churches here."¹⁰ Pastor Sauer let the people in on the mission's plan for the future and invited the neighborhood to be a part of it. Rev. Sauer then fielded questions from the attendees. At the bottom of the agenda for the meeting Pastor Sauer had a form where people could express their interest in the mission which he could use as the beginning of a prospect list and source of a nucleus.

⁹March 3, 1994 Bellevue Mission Task Force meeting minutes.

¹⁰Ron Umentum, qt. in the Tuesday, September 6, 1994 Green Bay Press-Gazette.

Two weeks later the core group got together on April 5 to take care of some necessary business. The first item on the agenda was to name the church. There were nine suggestions given. They were Living Word, Messiah, Community Lutheran, Abiding Word, Gethsemane, Salem, St. Luke, Mt. Calvary, and Shepherd's Path. The group narrowed the list down to two. The finalists were Living Word and Messiah. Messiah was selected by the group to be the name of their new church.

After that decision was made other issues could be decided on. The next things on the agenda were scheduling canvassing and training and times for an opening service and Bible classes. At this meeting the congregation's first major canvass was scheduled for September 24 with two smaller canvasses for two hours each on May 14 and 21. The first service was also scheduled as was the place to hold it. The first service was scheduled for May 1, 1994 in the lower level of Denmark State Bank. The meeting continued with a plea to work together and help each other in the work of the mission and to "invite, invite, invite."¹¹

On April 12 Rev. Sauer took the first step toward public recognition of the fledgling congregation. A letter was addressed to Mr. Kevin Isaacson of the Green Bay Press-Gazette. In this letter Rev. Sauer introduced himself as the pastor of Emanuel in Henrysville. He also explained that the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod had commissioned him to start a new church in Bellevue. The decision on the name of the mission along with its first service were relayed. Denmark State Bank was named as the place of services and the time was listed at 10:15 AM with a Bible class at 9:15 AM Sunday. Rev. Sauer asked to be included in the paper's listing of churches and for any publicity that they would deem appropriate. The new mission was now public.

¹¹Agenda for the April 5, 1994 meeting of the core for the Bellevue exploratory mission.

The last Bellevue Mission Task Force meeting took place on April 14. There was really no new business taken up, but there were updates about the progress of the mission effort. It was reported that about two-thirds of the twenty-five people who attended the open forum were now members of the mission's core group. Along with other new members, they totalled 22 communicants and 35 baptized souls. The canvass dates were given as well as the date and time for the first service. The final item of business was a list of items needed for Messiah's first church service. Altarware, offering baskets, a lectern, and fellowship supplies were needed. Above all else Rev. Sauer asked for the prayers of his fellow Christians for the mission and bulletin notices in the neighboring congregations for their new sister church.

Due to the small size of the bank the congregation was worshiping in, Rev. Sauer sent out a letter to the pastors of the neighboring congregation on April 20 concerning a special "celebratory" service. The feeling of Messiah's leadership was that, in their present circumstance, they would not be able to accommodate all worshipers if such a service took place immediately. For that reason the congregation asked for a prayer to the Lord from their fellow Christians and invited all to visit the congregation over the summer.

The next major event in Messiah's history is an important first. On May 1, 1994 Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church held its first worship service at the Denmark State Bank. The attendance at the service was 60 people, 29 of whom were visitors. About one-half of those 29 visitors are now members of the congregation as well.¹² The charter members at the first service are listed below.¹³

¹²Information from Rev. Sauer.

¹³For further membership numbers see the chart in the appendix.

CHARTER MEMBERS

Larry & Judy Boettoher, Marissa & Landon
Gene & Audrey Burmeister
Craig & Lisa Lindow, Kirsten & Kayla
Paula Mleziva, Wesley & Alison
John & Brenda Sauer, Emily
Pastor Stephen & Tina Sauer, Sarah, Alyssa, Brian, Laura
Doug & Sherrie Voigt
Len & Jodee Wallin, Alex & Katee
Rob & Romelle Zeratsky, Robin & Kurtis

Membership as of May 1, 1994

On May 8, 1994 Rev. Sauer had the privilege of performing the first baptism in Messiah's history. One of the ways that St. Mark congregation had shown their support for the congregation was that their ladies aid sent the mission a gift of baptismal napkins.¹⁴ These were put to use quickly. Pastor's daughter, Casey, was the first of many children to be brought into God's kingdom through this washing of rebirth and renewal at Messiah.

Already at the second service there were membership gains. Twelve new members were added to Messiah's family.

May 8, 1994 additions to membership

Casey Sauer - Baptized; William & MaryAnn Behrendt, Courtney
Brian Burmeister, Kevin Burmeister
Peter Jindra, Zachary
Jerry & Mary Vanderkinter, Jodi Vanderkinter, Mark Vanderkinter

Messiah also got support from the Lutheran elementary school run by St. Paul. Messiah was the third quarter mission project for the students, and as a follow up they helped Rev. Sauer canvass the Bellevue area. They did doorbag hanging to help in the mission effort.¹⁵

¹⁴Letter of thanks from Rev. Sauer to St Mark Ladies Aid.

¹⁵Permission slip for the students to do the doorbagging from St. Paul Lutheran School.

July 24, 1994 brought about the beginning of a tradition in the mission congregation. Messiah's first outdoor worship service and church picnic was held at Josten Park in Bellevue. The public was invited and encouraged to bring lawn chairs for seating. This outdoor service has taken place each of Messiah's first three years and has been favorably received both in the congregation and in the community.

Thanks to the efforts of Messiah's core group, Rev. Sauer was able to complete the mission's first fall neighborhood canvass on September 24, 1994. This canvass added to the prospect list which seemed to be growing wildly along with the tremendous growth in Bellevue. Rev. Sauer had also been using a "new mover" service to locate prospects, and that service was giving him more and more names every month as Bellevue's growth continued at a steady pace. Without the help of the core Rev. Sauer probably could not have kept up with the rapid growth.

This rapid growth precipitated a big change at Messiah. Five and one half months after its initial service Messiah had outgrown its environment and needed to find another place to worship. That presented a problem. In Bellevue there are not many places suitable for public worship. Since the town is nearly all residential there were few buildings that could accommodate such a group. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod had attempted a mission in Bellevue. They had worshiped in the back room of a tavern which did not put a good impression in people's minds. The Evangelical Lutheran church in America mission was moving into the public elementary school about the same time which left very few options. The problem was solved when Pauline Stone was approached about the use of one of the rooms in the *Growing Time Child Care Centre*. The day care had a large back room which could accommodate 80 people easily and over 100 with a little work. This day care center became the house of worship for Messiah on October 23, 1994 and has been so until the

present.

The fact that Messiah was worshiping in a day care which had to be set up for worship before each service and had to be taken back down after the service made some things impossible to do because of the day care's hours of operation. One of those impossibilities was to hold advent services in the day care. As Christmas approached Rev. Sauer knew that this first Christmas together as a mission should be a special service. For that reason a special song service was done. A special invitation card was mailed to the residents of the community inviting them to a service of "song and God's Word, spoken and sung by us and our children."¹⁶ On Christmas morning at 10:15 AM, seventy-eight people gathered together to celebrate the Savior's birth. The service presented a wonderful opportunity to share the wonderful news of a Savior born in the city of David.

After Christmas came the new year, a new year filled with challenges and opportunities, new growth, excitement and more firsts. Early in February Messiah finalized work on its congregational mission statement.

Messiah's Mission Statement

We, the members of Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, desire to praise our Lord, nurture the church and reach out to the unchurched in and around the Bellevue area, so that all may believe in Christ and receive the gift of eternal life

An important step toward the congregation's goal of reaching all of Bellevue was taken on February 26, 1995. After the Sunday services, Pastor Wayne Schulz, the mission's counselor, conducted a workshop on personal evangelism. He presented ways that the members of the mission could share their faith with others. This presentation was an excellent capstone on what had been a

¹⁶Christmas 1994 invitation.

very exciting day. In the worship service earlier that day Messiah saw its first adult confirmand publicly confessed her faith. Pauline Stone, who owns the day care, had come to know her Savior through Pastor Sauer's instruction and was received into communicant membership. The congregation saw the results of the methods they were being shown in the afternoon, and it provided a very excellent example and motivation to the fledgling mission.

Three weeks later the congregation saw two more firsts. April 16 was the first Easter spent together as a congregation. Seventy-five people filled the day care singing the praises of their risen Lord. Easter also was the first time that the members of Messiah's choir used their collected voices to praise the Lord in a service setting. Under the direction of Gene Burmeister the choir praised the risen Lord and beautified the worship of the congregation.

MESSIAH'S FIRST CHOIR
Gene Burmeister - Director
Kathy Bell, Lora Bell
Pete Jindra, Paula Mleziva
Sonya Oberbrunner, Rev. Sauer
Pauline Stone, Karen Wolf

Messiah took a "mini-canvass" approach to canvassing. Since it has become harder to get people together for extended periods of time on weekends the congregation opted to do two morning canvasses instead of one all day canvass. The first of these "mini-canvasses" took place April 29 and May 6. These canvasses presented an opportunity for the members to serve their Lord and to spread the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The end of May is traditionally time for many confirmations. In 1995 Messiah was no

different. On May 21 the first youth confirmation in Messiah's history when Robin Zeratsky confessed his faith before the congregation and was accepted into full communicant membership.

The ladies of the congregation organized themselves into a worship/fellowship group. On June 6 this group of ladies selected a name which would constantly remind them why they were meeting together, and why they were there. They named the group W.I.S.H. -- Women Interested in Serving Him.

On June 11, 1995 Messiah held its first of two outdoor services of the summer. In the same way as in the first outdoor service, the public was invited and responded well. On June 11 seventy-four people joined the congregation for worship. The second run of the summer was conducted on August 13 when 68 people joined the congregation for its worship service.

Two weeks after the June 11 service an important event in Messiah's congregational history took place. After the service a special congregational forum was held in which the acting church council received approval from the members to seek mission status from the Synod's Board for Home Missions. This desire to move from "exploratory" status to that of "mission" showed the numerical growth with which the congregation had been blessed in a little over one year's time. Through the Lord's work December of 1994 Messiah showed a net membership of fifty-three baptized souls, thirty-two being communicant members. In June 1995 the numbers had grown to sixty-five baptized souls and forty-four communicants. This growth led to the application for mission status and another interesting twist in a mission situation - a vicar.

After a busy June, Rev. Sauer's July was taken up with a vacation to recharge the batteries and vicar supervisor training along with the regular congregational ministry. Due to the large middler class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1995, the assignment committee assigned fifteen vicars to

mission settings. This program, called Vicar in Mission, was subsidized by the Board for Home Missions. These vicars were assigned to gain extra experience in evangelism which a vicar in a normal setting would not necessarily receive. Rev. Sauer had submitted a proposal with Rev. Michael Dietz of First in Green Bay to enter the program. This joint proposal would give their vicar experience in a larger church with all of its programs as well as the mission. This vicar was the first at First Lutheran in that congregation's long history as well as being Messiah's first. It was the hope of the two supervising pastors that the vicar would receive a well-rounded vicar year.

The Synod's assignment committee assigned David Karow of Madison, Wisconsin to be the shared vicar for First Ev. Lutheran and Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church. On September 10, 1995 Vicar Karow was installed in the 8:00 AM service at First and at the 10:15 AM service at Messiah. One of Vicar Karow's first official duties was to take part in Messiah's outreach efforts in the neighborhoods of Bellevue. Rev. Sauer credits that as being one of the greatest benefits of the program. Vicar Karow was assigned the initial "cold calls" on the people who were listed on the new mover reports. This freed Rev. Sauer up to concentrate his efforts on the follow up of "hot" prospects and to concentrate his time on instructing new members. The number of calls that both men were able to make to reach people with the Word of God contributed to the amount of new members the congregation took in during Vicar Karow's time at Messiah from September 1995 to August 1996.

With the rapid growth of the congregation a constitution needed to be drawn up for legal reasons. Therefore, on September 27 Messiah's Constitution Committee met to work on the constitution for the congregation. Using the constitutions of St Paul, Green Bay, and the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod Model Constitution, the committee worked out a constitution which was

presented to the congregation. Upon congregational approval the constitution was sent to the Northern Wisconsin District Constitution Committee for its approval. This first draft was sent back to the congregation for clarification, especially to define what was meant by the congregation's Board of Trustees. With these changes made the constitution could be presented to the congregation. This recommendation was made in the December 7, 1995 council meeting. Messiah was on its way as a legal entity. As an organization the congregation had elected leaders to help guide it through the future.

Messiah's First Church Leaders

Pastor: Stephen Sauer
President/VP: Doug Voigt
Secretary: Pete Jindra
Financial Secretary/Treasurer: Gene Burmeister
Evangelism: Bill Behrendt
Trustee/Building & Grounds: Jerry Vanderkinter
Education: Rob Zeratsky

The ladies of the congregation had also taken some of the leadership where it was appropriate.

Organist: Paula Mleziva
Historian: Audrey Burmeister
Worship/Fellowship: Romelle Zeratsky & Debbie Desrorchers

October 1, 1995 brought some good news to the congregation from the Board for Home Missions. The Board had looked over Messiah's application for mission status, and that status had been granted. The Board also approved Messiah's application for land search authority. Things were beginning to pick up speed. With that news the council immediately began looking for affordable plots of land in good places in Bellevue. Bellevue's population growth had driven up land prices into

the \$15,000 an acre range or more. Much of October and November was taken in the search for land.

A parcel of land was found on county highway JJ, a little over a mile from the JJ/Manitowoc Road interchange in Bellevue. Doug Voigt looked into this parcel, and it appeared to be about the best the congregation would find. This parcel was a six acre plot at a cost of \$10,000 per acre.¹⁷ The only drawback seemed to be that the piece was zoned for farmland and it was outside of the Green Bay metro sewer district. Voigt was assured that these problems could be worked out. This parcel was slotted right next to the Duqaine family cemetery. Voigt was directed by the council to work on a favorable agreement where Messiah would not have to purchase or be liable for broken headstones and vandalism in the cemetery but would do the lawn mowing and tree trimming of the cemetery.

December 10, 1995 was the date of a very important congregational meeting. At this meeting the proposed constitution written in September and revised and reviewed in October was presented to the congregation for approval and adoption. The constitution was approved and adopted, and all confirmed members of the congregation signed the constitution.

The second order of business of the meeting was the consideration of making an offer to purchase the six acres of land on highway JJ. This offer would be contingent on obtaining a favorable agreement in regard to the cemetery. The motion made to submit an offer was unanimously approved, and Doug Voigt was directed to do the work on this offer to purchase.

This congregational meeting also notified the congregation that a nominating committee comprised of Doug Voigt, Jerry Vanderkinter, Larry Bell, and Rev. Sauer would meet December 14,

¹⁷Minutes from December 10, 1995 Congregational Meeting.

1995 to select a slate of candidates for the church council. The first ever annual meeting for the congregation was scheduled for January 21, 1996 at 2:00 PM.

In January of 1995 Rev. Sauer gave Vicar Karow the assignment to work on a phone canvass/survey to cover the homes that had been missed in all the other “mini-canvasses.” This was set up so that lay members could take a sheet with 10-15 names and phone numbers and make calls when they had time. The success of this “canvass” was very limited, and it showed that the best method of canvass in Bellevue was the door to door visit.

On January 21, 1996 Messiah’s first Congregational and Voter’s Meeting was held since being granted mission status. One of the key announcements was that the congregation had received its certificate of Incorporation from the state of Wisconsin. The officially incorporated name of the congregation was given as Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church. This meeting elected Messiah’s first official church council.

<i><u>Messiah's First Official Church Council</u></i>	
President:	Doug Voigt
Vice President:	Larry Bell
Secretary:	Pete Jindra
Treasurer:	Gene Burmeister
Financial Secretary:	Kevin Burmeister
Evangelism:	Bill Behrendt
Elders:	Darren Ashley
Stewardship:	Mike Aubrey
Property Management:	Jerry Vanderkinter
Education:	Rob Zeratsky

The February 7 council meeting held at Denmark State Bank addressed the signing of lending documents from the synod. These documents officially turned over the parsonage from the synod to the congregation. The council also authorized the purchase of forty additional hymnals for the congregation. The steady growth the church had experienced made them a necessity.

March 3, 1996 was the date of a special service as Rev. Sauer and Vicar Karow made preparations and arranged for an a capella singing group from the Madison, WI area to present an in service concert. The group, Hymns of Praise, is a group of Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod members who have a talent for and enjoy using their voices to praise the Lord. Vicar Karow's father was one of the members of the group and the liaison between the group and Messiah. Messiah planned the concert as an outreach invitation event. The service was advertised in the church directory of the newspaper as well as a press release in the religion section of the paper. The group came up on March 2 and practiced for a concert at 8:00 AM at First Ev. Lutheran Church. They went to Messiah on Sunday and presented a service in song for the congregation in a "full house" of about 110 people. The event was thoroughly enjoyed by both the group and the congregation who expressed their thanks with a pot-luck dinner at the Vicar's. The fellowship opportunity this provided was an excellent source of growth and appreciation for fellow believers for both groups.

March 4, 1996 was a historic day in the history of Messiah. Messiah went into cyber space. One of the main objectives or goals for Vicar Karow when he arrived in Green Bay was to create an online presence at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay. After investigation of the possibilities late in 1995 the University administration denied any use of the campus network for religious purposes. This made it necessary to find another way to do it. Shortly after the new year began Vicar Karow came across an article on writing home pages on the Internet. Karow talked the idea over with Rev. Sauer who thought it would be something to pursue. After some work to figure out the logistics the home page was written as well as a directory of Green Bay Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod churches.¹⁸ The other churches in the city were invited to contribute to the content, but none

¹⁸<http://netnet.net/~messiah/>

responded. Rev. Sauer has routinely placed sermons, bulletins, newsletters, Bible studies, and historical notes and announcements on the site. During the 1996 Summer Olympics one of the local Green Bay television stations did a story on the web site during their newscast. Rev. Sauer was interviewed, and the site was shown on Green Bay's NBC affiliate. This was a great way to get the name of the congregation out into the community along with its message.

On April 3 the council met and was notified that the offer to purchase the 6 acres of the Duquaine property had been signed. The only thing^s standing in the way of Messiah having possession of the land were zoning problems and access rights. The offer to purchase had made the purchase contingent on these working out so that the congregation would not be saddled with a piece of land it could not use. This council meeting also made the recommendation to the congregation that the congregation apply to the Northern Wisconsin district of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for admission to the synod.

The congregation held a congregational meeting on May 19, 1996. The congregation was updated on the land purchase and the work of the boards of the church. Announcements were made of the upcoming Worship in the Park on June 16 and the NW Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod district convention June 17-19. The congregation was asked to provide a delegate to the convention, but no one had the time slots available. Vicar Karow was penciled in as the congregation's lay delegate. This convention would be acting on Messiah's application for membership in the synod.

June 8 was another of Messiah's "mini-canvasses." Rev. Sauer had turned the project over to Vicar Karow as part of his training. The weekend of the canvass was moved because of a conflict for some of the members, and it ended up being on a day with very few people at home because of the Bellevue's popular fireman's picnic which was held the same day. The canvass was a hard draw

for members as well, and much of the work on it was done by Vicar Karow and Rev. Sauer in the following weeks.

The following Sunday, June 16, was the scheduled outreach event that the congregation looked forward to annually. This edition of Worship in the Park was run by Vicar Karow. Rev. Sauer gave Vicar Karow the honor of presenting the sermon on that Sunday, and the service was blessed to have the baptism of the congregation's newest member. Following the service the congregation avoided the storm clouds and enjoyed a congregational church picnic. Turnout was excellent considering the weather. An invitation had been extended to the other area congregations to take part in a friendly game of softball after the picnic. Members of St. Paul and First came and enjoyed the afternoon with the members of Messiah.

The next day was the beginning of the 1996 Northern Wisconsin District convention held at Fox Valley Lutheran High School in Appleton. Rev. Sauer and Vicar Karow attended the convention. At this convention Messiah's application for membership into the NW of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod was reviewed by the committee and found to be in order. The committee recommended that the convention accept the application for membership, and on June 19 Messiah was unanimously accepted by delegates as a member of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

The August 8 council meeting was marked by a new development in the land purchase situation. While Rev. Sauer was on vacation at the beginning of August, Vicar Karow received a phone call from Rev. Leonard Buelow of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's mission on Green Bay's west side. Christ the King was also looking for land and was willing to relocate to find it. They were offered a piece of land adjacent to the piece of land Messiah had an offer to purchase on. Rev.

Buelow had heard rumors about Messiah looking on the east side and was checking the rumor out. When Vicar Karow told him about Messiah's offer and the problems encountered with it, Rev. Buelow withdrew the ELS interest in the parcel they were offered and instructed Vicar Karow to have someone look into that piece. Vicar Karow spoke to Doug Voigt about the situation, and Voigt gathered more information about the parcel and the pluses and minuses of that property. This piece was only four and one half acres and was priced at \$16,500 an acre. However, this parcel was fully inside the sewer district, and could be rezoned much more easily than the previous. The council recommended that this option be pursued and to look into cutting off the offer to purchase on the previous parcel. That piece looked like it would never be available due to legal problems with it.

This council meeting also noted a growing need in the congregation. There was a serious need to buy more chairs for use in the day care. Attendance had grown steadily over the two and one half years of the congregations existence. A small problem to have, but a great tribute to the work of the Lord in making the mission flourish.

The September 29, 1996 congregational meeting updated the congregation on the new development in the land purchase saga. The congregation approved the possibility of looking at the new piece of land as long as the church could be extricated from the previous offer to purchase. The final bit of new business for the meeting was a schedule change for the summer services. From Memorial Day through Labor Day the service would be moved up to 9:30 AM from 10:15 AM.

After that congregational meeting the talks between Doug Voigt and Paul Kosmoski, who owned the new parcel, became more serious. Voigt entered an offer to purchase with Kosmoski on behalf of the congregation for four and one half acres of land at \$15,000. Kosmoski countered the offer with a price of \$16,000. This offer was accepted by Voigt and the legal process began anew

with this second parcel of land. The land was originally to be rezoned “institutional,” but a neighbor did not like the fact that if Messiah did not build a church the land could be used for a jail or some other institution. ^{caused the denial of} His protest denied the first zoning attempt. On April 15, 1997 the Bellevue Plan Commission approved the application made by Messiah for “conditional use in an R1 zone to build a church.”¹⁹ At the time of this writing the land purchase still is not final. The rezoning won’t be taken to the Town Board for approval until the fourth Wednesday of May. Currently, a new street pattern has been approved, a permit for a driveway off of county highway JJ has been given, and the property is on the list for sewer expansion. Everything looks like it will be in place for Messiah to start building in the summer of 1998 if the financing is ready.

The history of Messiah Ev. Lutheran Church to the point of this writing is a story of firsts. From the first meeting of the task force, to the first service, to the first confirmand - the Lord has blessed this congregation with growth and fine leadership throughout its short history. If the Lord continues to bless this congregation as he has in the past there is no reason to think that Messiah will not be a large, flourishing congregation firmly based in the Word of God and spreading that Word throughout its neighborhood.

Appendix -- Messiah's Monthly Membership				
	Baptized Souls	Communicants	Weekly Attendance	Weekly Offerings
May 1994	45	26	48	N/A
June 1994	45	26	39	N/A
July 1994	46	27	35	N/A

¹⁹Correspondence with Doug Voigt.

Appendix - Messiah's Monthly Membership				
August 1994	50	30	43	N/A
September 1994	50	30	36	N/A
October 1994	51	30	40	N/A
November 1994	51	30	38	N/A
December 1994	53	32	54	N/A
January 1995	59	37	43	N/A
February 1995	59	38	46	N/A
March 1995	59	38	50	N/A
April 1995	62	40	55	N/A
May 1995	66	44	62	N/A
June 1995	65	44	55	N/A
July 1995	63	44	48	\$460.68
August 1995	78	55	63	\$432.38
September 1995	82	57	57	\$513.99
October 1995	83	58	59	\$483
November 1995	84	59	64	\$560
December 1995	85	59	63	\$556
January 1996	93	65	76	\$645
February 1996	96	68	72	\$600
March 1996	101	71	90	\$841.03
April 1996	105	72	79	\$709.93
May 1996	110	75	79	\$644.33
June 1996	118	81	69	\$803.31
July 1996	118	81	61	\$630.40
August 1996	120	79	75	\$740.35
September 1996	121	79	90	\$943.01
October 1996	124	82	94	\$792.84
November 1996	124	82	87	\$886.37
December 1996	125	83	80	\$1106.97
January 1997	127	84	91	\$1106.97
February 1997	133	87	92	\$828.64

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