

THE HISTORY OF
CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Marshall, Minnesota

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THE CIRCUIT RIDER YEARS (1878-1888)

During the second half of the last century, many Lutherans from Germany moved into the southwestern part of Minnesota and eastern South Dakota. They came looking to establish farms on the virgin prairie land with its rich and fertile soil. When they arrived, they found what they were looking for-- acres and acres of unbroken prairie land waiting to be tilled. The Lord had given them land on which they could prosper. Making a living and providing for one's family on Minnesota-Dakota frontier, however, was not easy task. These immigrants faced enormous obstacles just to survive. The winters were brutally cold. Everyday supplies, such as, food, clothing, medicine, farm equipment, etc., were hard to come by. If this were not bad enough, the immigrants had to remain wary of the Sioux Indians who still proved to be a threat to their lives as shown by the Sioux Indian Uprising of 1862 in which hundreds of settlers were massacred.

In this new land, not only did these Germans face many threats to their physical lives, but they also faced a threat to their spiritual lives. They had moved far from their home churches and were, therefore, without the services of trained pastors. Meanwhile, many Lutheran synods were being formed in the Midwest by Lutheran congregations in the larger cities. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Minnesota, founded in 1860 by several congregations in the Minneapolis/ St. Paul area, became aware of the spiritual plight of the German Lutherans on the frontier. To meet the needs of the immigrants and aware of the Lord's commission "to preach the Gospel to all nations," the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Minnesota, also called several men to

serve Lutheran families and establish congregations on the frontier. These men were called "Reisepredigers" translated "traveling preachers. Today we refer to them as "circuit riders."

In 1876, the Minnesota Synod, commissioned Pastor J. J. Hunziker to serve as a circuit rider southwestern Minnesota counties. (See Appendix for Geographical References.) Hunziker had received his training at the Pilgrar Missionary Institute in Basel, Switzerland, and was called to America by the Minnesota district in the 1860's. When he was commissioned, he was instructed to serve as many people as he could in southwestern Minnesota. The synod supplied him with a horse and buggy and an annual salary of \$300 for his work.¹

In 1870, Hunziker was sent to rural Renville, MN where he established St. Matthew and Bethany congregations. In 1876, Hunziker moved into Posen Township of Yellow Medicine County and made his home on a farm, his own, near Cottonwood and Wood Lake.² The first Lutheran service of the Minnesota Synod recorded in Lyon County was a marriage ceremony conducted by Pastor Hunziker in Skandia Township in or near what is now known as Balaton, MN.³ Church records are not available for the Ministerial acts of the pioneer missionaries. Due to the irregular visits and unorganized congregations, the pastors kept only private records. Only the marriage records which are officially recorded at the county court houses give us a clue to many of the activities of the "circuit riders."

The Lyon County History states that J. J. Hunziker investigated mission opportunities in several southwestern Minnesota and Eastern South Dakota counties, including Lyon County.⁴ Upon his report to the Synod, the Minnesota Synod called

Christian Boettcher in 1878 to serve as circuit rider in the far western counties of Minnesota, and in South Dakota, extending as far west as Redfield, South Dakota. He was instructed to set up his base in Marshall, Minnesota. At a salary of three hundred dollars a year this quiet but energetic man began aggressive mission work over a territory two hundred miles long by one hundred fifty miles wide.⁵

In a letter written to Christ Lutheran, his son records some interesting history about the life of Christian Boettcher.

H.P. Christoph Boettcher (not Christian as given in the "*History of the Minnesota Synod*") was born at Meinern, Kr. Soltau, Province Hannover, Germany, November 9, 1846. His parents died while he was an infant, and he was brought up by an uncle on his mother's side. While his own pastor was a "Rationalist" he got early into contact with the Harms brothers at Hermannsburg and very often walked the seven hours to Hermannsburg with his uncle to attend Harms' services, even when quite young. In 1867 or 1868, he was drafted into military service and remained with the army until after the Franco-Prussian War. Immediately after peace was declared he emigrated to America.

He was anxious to serve his Savior in the ministry, and by advice of Pastor Th. Harms got into contact with Praeses Sieker of the Minnesota Synod. He was advised to go to St. Louis, and if I am not mistaken, the Minnesota Christians helped pay his way. he entered the practical Seminary department at St. Louis in September, 1871, and graduated in 1875 (When C.F.W. Walther was president). His first charge was at Eitzen, Minnesota, with a salary of \$150 per annum..."⁶

On December 20, 1878, Boettcher moved into a home in Marshall, Minnesota. On Christmas Day, he conducted his first service in Town Limestone, Lincoln County which is about twenty-two miles northwest of Marshall.⁷ The following day, Gottlieb Mahnke and Anna Haase were married by Pastor Boettcher in Town Limestone.⁸ They

were the grandparents of Walter Pochardt, Lucille Nysten, and June Skoog, all present members of Christ Lutheran.

Pastor Boettcher soon ran into difficulties, as he states in his 1879 report to the Minnesota Synod:

It was on Friday before Christmas, 1878 (December 20th), when I arrived in Marshall, Lyon County... Finally I wish to remind you that I cannot continue to live in Marshall for any length of time due to the high cost of living and rental, and that I must support my family with my meagre income... Furthermore, the number of services for my family are so few and reading services not easily arranged because only few Germans live in Marshall, who have so little interest in preaching of God's Word that they will not even attend the services. A more suitable place to live would be in the midst of a settlement of twelve Lutheran families about twenty-two miles west of Marshall. A homestead of eighty acres is to be had there. It is not worth very much, but for a pastor, who is not a farmer and does not desire to be one, which he should not nor dare not do, it would be good enough if it had a dwelling. However, since the people have been living there barely a year and are so poor that they have no bread to eat, due to the crop failure, therefore I have suggested to the committee of three for the consideration of the Synod the following plan: 1. That the Synod build a home there, lay claim to the eighty acres; or, 2. That Synod build the parsonage for the congregation and give title to the congregation as soon as the amount invested has been repaid. In both cases let it be done in the name of the Lord..." (Pastor Boettcher's report to the Minnesota Synod, translated from the German).⁹

Pastor Boettcher's report in 1880 indicates that the Synod accepted the suggestion and erected a parsonage about twenty-two miles from Marshall in Alta Vista township in Lincoln County. The parsonage was located about seven miles west of the town of Minneota in northeast Lincoln County, near Town Limestone. The parsonage served as a place of worship and as a Christian day school four days a week. Although

never formally organizing, the congregation at Alta Vista was called Bethel congregation.¹⁰ The Lyon County court house records show that Pastor Boettcher's address changed from Marshall to Minneota between the months of July and November 1879.¹¹ In spite of these difficulties in Marshall, church services were continued in private homes when Pastor Boettcher traveled through Marshall. When Pastor Boettcher was unable to make it to Marshall for one reason or another, Pastor J. Reinhaut of St. Luke's Posen Township would serve the group in Marshall.¹²

In Boettcher's report to Synod in 1879, he records that he had gathered twenty-seven preaching stations: two in Lyon County (one being Marshall), three in Redwood County, one in Renville County, three in Yellow Medicine County, four in Lincoln County, one in Pipestone County, and eight in six counties in the Dakota Territory. If that was not enough, he was planning to go into Lac qui Parle County and Murray County.¹³

From his homestead in Lincoln County,, where he place^d his growing family, Christian Boettcher visited between twenty-five and thirty five preaching stations in his large territory, including Marshall, about once every six weeks with a horse and buggy. In the winter he could not cover all the places, but went as far as he could go by train, team, or snow shoes. During the years 1879-1885, he held services with baptisms at ninety -one different places in Minnesota and Dakota.¹⁴

At that time, the young people who were of confirmation instruction age, received their instructions at Pastor Boettcher's home in Northeast Lincoln County. He would transport them in his buggy to his parsonage west of Minneota. There they would remain until their course of instruction was completed. Meanwhile, they worked in and

about the parsonage for Pastor Boettcher. A trip in the buggy of the pastor, in those days, could be a hazardous journey. One of the Haase sisters and Pastor Boettcher were carried down stream in a flooded creek north of Marshall after the buggy capsized. Pastor and the girl were forced to tread water, but thankfully they were able to swim safely to the riverbank.¹⁵

On January 1, 1884, Bethel congregation of Alta Vista joined with St. John's, Boyd (Omro Township) to form one parish. Pastor Boettcher subsequently moved his residence to Boyd. After his move, Pastor Boettcher could not adequately serve the group in Marshall because of his added responsibilities. The Marshall Lutherans then called Wilhem Scheitel, pastor of St. Luke's of Posen Township and St. John's of Wood Lake to serve them on a regular basis. He served Marshall from 1884-1888. On May 20, 1892, Pastor Scheitel drowned while attempting to ford the Yellow Medicine River with a team of horses on his way to perform a wedding.¹⁶

Between the years 1878-1888 there is little information to tell us about this group of Christians in Marshall. No documents give record of an organized Lutheran congregation at Marshall during this time. Because they made irregular visits, circuit riders often kept their own private records and the congregations did not bother to make records at all. A few records, though, do remain. A baptismal certificate of the daughter of Pastor Theo. Mueller, of Uniontown MO, states that services were held in the home of a man named Mr. Black. One member recalls having attended services at a hotel operated by a Mr. Highmore.¹⁷ Other than these two recollections, nothing more is known about the activities of the Marshall Lutherans up to 1888. What we do know is that the zeal of Pastor Boettcher and the "circuit riders" and the power of the Holy Spirit

working through Word and Sacrament continued to keep this small group of Christians together during some very difficult times.

Years of Uniting and Dividing (1888-1915)

In November 1888, this group of Lutherans in Marshall organized a congregation under the name of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Charter members of this congregation, listed in a previous history of the congregation, were: Theodore Tessmer, Charles Mellenthin, Julius Schultz, William Marks, and Fred Guelow.¹⁸ A. P. Rose's *History of Lyon County* includes these men as charter members plus another man by the name of Reinhold Musch.¹⁹

The congregation called Pastor Reinhold Poethke, resident pastor of St. Peter's congregation of Balaton to serve them. Since Pastor Poethke was a "circuit rider" services were conducted once every three weeks. For the first four years, the congregation held met in private homes and in public buildings.²⁰

Reinhold Poethke was born in Berlin, Germany and received his early education there. According to Ella Schultz, a member of Christ Lutheran, whose "Aunt Martha" was one of Pastor Poethke's daughters, a friend offered him a purse of money if he would go to America and preach the Gospel. Without knowing how much money was in the purse, he accepted the offer. Several years later, he paid all the money back.²¹

Pastor Poethke graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College's Theological Department in 1886. Upon graduation, he was called by St. Paul's Lutheran in St. James, Minnesota where he served for two years. In 1888, he moved to Balaton, MN to serve as a "circuit rider" for St. Peter's in Balaton, Zion in Island Lake, Immanuel in

Tyler, St. Jacob's in Fountain Prairie Township (later in Holland), and preached to a group of families near Amiret (Sodus Township).²²

Fortunately, Christ Lutheran possesses four of Pastor Poethke's pocket-sized notebooks in which recorded births, baptisms, confirmations, communions, marriages, and deaths in the six places he served from 1892-1916. The earliest activities of his ministry were perhaps recorded in a notebook which is lost. During Pastor Poethke's pastorate in Balaton and Marshall increasing numbers of settlers were pouring into southwestern Minnesota among them many Lutherans looking for a pastor. Pastor Poethke recorded that he was serving 80 souls in the six congregations in 1892. By 1896, that number swelled to almost 500.²³ Because the group in Marshall was growing in number, perhaps around 100 souls, private homes became too small to hold worship services. In 1892, St. John's congregation in Marshall rented the Icelandic Church on Main Street and purchased an organ.²⁴ The congregation finally had a regular place to worship.

With the coming of many more settlers, life in southwestern Minnesota was becoming much more civilized. There were, however, still many difficulties to overcome. One of our members recalls her parents telling her an incident when Pastor Poethke set out on early on a winter Sunday morning to hold services in Tyler and Island Lake. He returned very late that night to announce that he had twice tipped over in the sleigh but had managed to right it on both occasions to complete the trip.²⁵

During the 1890's, Pastor Poethke developed a serious throat ailment, probably as a result of his many travels. In 1901, he resigned his call as pastor of five of his six

congregations and moved into a home on the southeast side of Marshall. From there, he continued to serve St. John's in Marshall on a limited basis.²⁶

Pastor Poethke, however, had ^{more} than his health with which to contend during this time. He had to deal with congregational strife. During the 1890's, doctrinal controversy disrupted the peace of the congregation. In 1896, several members severed their affiliation with St. John's and formed "Die Ev. Lutheran Christus Gemeinde" ("gemeinde" means "congregation"). We have no record of the substance of the controversy, but an itinerant Ohio Synod missionary, Pastor R. Ehwald, seems to have infiltrated the congregation and encouraged several members to separate from St. John's. A. P. Rose's *History of Lyon County* contains this account of this Ohio Synod congregation:

In June, 1896, dissatisfaction arose among some of the members, who left the church and organized a new society under the protection of the Ohio Synod. The trustees of the new organization were Fred Mellentin, and August Schwabe. The organization was brought about through the labors of Rev. R. Ehwald, who preached in and around Marshall from the fall of 1896 until the next spring... Lots for a church building were purchased on Lyons Street in April 1897 and that summer the church was erected. It was dedicated on Sunday, July 18, by Rev. Ernst of St. Paul.²⁷

The two congregations worshiped in separate buildings and were served by separate synods, St. John's by the Minnesota Synod and Christ by the Ohio Synod. They were served by several Ohio Synod pastors during these twelve years, E. Ehwald, H. Drews, G. Wannemacher, William Hartlage. The Ohio Synod's *Verzeichnis der Gemeinden* of 1900 records this congregation. Translated from the German it reads, "G. R. Wannemacher. Christ, Marshall. Organized 1897. Communicants 35."²⁸

Fortunately, this separation lasted only a short time as the *History of Lyon County* states, "Both branches of the German Lutheran Church continued to maintain organizations until the summer of 1908 when a reconciliation was effected." In the spring of 1908, members from both congregations held meetings for the purpose of reuniting. On July 6, 1908 the congregations reunited and called Pastor Poethke of the Minnesota Synod to be their pastor. They decided, however, to drop the name St. John's and retain the name "Ev. Lutheran Christus Gemeinde" (translated "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Congregation"). At that same meeting they also decided to hold services in the church building built by Christ congregation since it was a larger building than the one in which St. John's had worshipped.²⁹

Twenty-one men signed the constitution, and according to the Minnesota Syond's parochial report for 1908, this congregation had a total of 108 souls, of which 72 were communicants. Pastor Poethke served the congregation until he retired in 1915. During those eight years the congregation grew to 214 souls, of which 185 were communicants.³⁰ The Lord had indeed blessed this union.

On August 21, 1913, a number of married and younger unmarried women of Christ Lutheran met to organize a ladies aid society. At this meeting Pastor Poethke presented a constitution which was discussed and after a number of changes was accepted. The purpose of this society was "to build the Kingdom of God in general and the local congregation in particular." The Ladies Aid has continued to exist until this day.³¹

In 1915, Pastor Poethke, feeling that Christ Lutheran should have a pastor who was able to preach in English, left Marshall and moved to Holland, Minnesota where he

had been serving a small group of German Lutherans since 1911. A year later he retired from the ministry. When he died in 1941 at the age of 81, funeral services were conducted at Christ Lutheran and he was buried in the Marshall cemetery. His role in the history of Christ congregation was summed up by one of its members Frank Mellenthin, "Pastor Poethke, with the help of God, kept this church in harmony and it progressed."³²

Years of Change (1915-1939)

In 1915, Pastor Edward Birkholz of Darfur, Minnesota accepted the call to Marshall. A few years later the congregation suffered a loss in membership because of a strict adherence to the divine word. The Minnesota Synod's Parochial Report for 1919 records a membership of 166 souls, down from 214 in 1915.³³ Christ's Lutherans' courageous stand on the Word, however, served to strengthen it from within. A former member wrote, "The increase (numerical growth) has never been spectacular, but it has been sound, as the issue of membership to this day is based upon the Lord's injunction: 'If you continue in my Word then are ye my disciples indeed.'³⁴

Several significant events happened during Pastor Birkholz's stay in Marshall. Congregational minutes show that a Mission Festival was first observed on September 1, 1917. Mission Festivals have played an important role in the congregation's history. Leona Schultz recalls one of those early mission festivals:

I remember a few highlights as a small child. Our church and Sunday School would go out to Eastman's Grove, west of Marshall, where we held our annual mission festival service. Rev. Birkholz was a real leader and could he sing... his voice ringing through the woods. Everyone enjoyed singing together. The organ and lectern were loaded and brought out to the woods and placed on a platform the men

had built. Planks and blocks were brought for us to sit on. A picnic dinner followed.³⁵

Pastor Birkholz served at a time when In January 1919, "It was decided to alternate church services with German one Sunday and American (English) the next Sunday." In 1925, another change was made, services would be held in both languages each Sunday. German services were conducted until 1938 when they were discontinued altogether.³⁶

In the spring of 1919, a parsonage was purchased about five blocks away from the church. This house would serve a parsonage until 1939. The church no longer owns this home, but the building still stands at 410 South Fourth Street.³⁷

Pastor Birkholz accepted a call to Redwood Falls in 1932 after having served Christ Lutheran for 17 years. He was a dearly loved man and many were disappointed to see him go. Leona Schultz has fond memories of Pastor Birkholz:

Rev. Birkholz was an outdoor's man who lived with his family in the parsonage at 410 S. Fourth St., down by the "Old Mill Dam", which at that time was at the south edge of Marshall. He loved his gardening and also raised chickens. He would exhibit both vegetables and chickens at the county fair. He would bring a large bag of peanuts in the shell to the picnic and scatter them in the long, unmowed grass, calling, "Come chick, chick, chick." We would all scramble to find them. What fun! We also had three-legged races and sack races. The men played horseshoes in the shade of the trees.³⁸

When Pastor Birkholz accepted the call to Redwood Falls in 1932, Pastor Henry Sprenger of White, South Dakota succeeded him. With peace and harmony prevailing and the congregation outgrowing its place of worship, preliminary arrangements were made in electing and assigning various committees to consider a building program.

The necessity for a new church was an important issue at every meeting. Zoning ordinances prohibited an addition to the church conforming to the same material and style of architecture. The council, therefore, appointed a committee to look into selling the church property. Because of legal difficulties in making a sale, however, it was decided to keep the building. Nevertheless, a building fund custodian was elected in 1935 and the following year a number of men volunteered to solicit funds and subscriptions to determine the willingness of the congregation to build a new church. At its annual meeting in 1937, the congregation decided to build a new structure.⁹⁹

The Gamm Years (1938-1969)

As the building program was getting off the ground, Pastor Sprenger accepted a call to St. Peter's in Balaton. After a short vacancy, Pastor Edgar Gamm of Mobridge, South Dakota accepted the call to Marshall and was installed on May 1, 1938. The change in pastors, however, did not slow the building program at all. At a special meeting on May 15, 1938, the congregation approved final plans for the new church building and construction began immediately on the corner of third and Marshall streets.

The cornerstone was laid on September 1938. A box placed inside the cornerstone contains: a Bible, a book containing all of the Lutheran Confessions transferred from the old cornerstone, a copy of the *Marshall Daily Messenger* of August 18, 1938, the *Lyon County Independent* of September 22, 1938, the *Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde Blatt* of September 4, 1938, the Proceedings of the 24th convention of the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1937, the Synodical Report

of the Minnesota District of 1938, Luther's Catechism, an English Hymnal, a German Hymnal, a history of the congregation, the Constitution of the congregation, a list of pastors, church officers, elders, trustees, Sunday School officers, teachers, and enrollment, names of building committee members, architect, contractor and legal advisor; the building contracts, and the names of the president of the U.S., vice-president, governor of the state and the mayor of the city.

The new church was dedicated to the service of the Lord on December 11, 1938. The congregation gathered at the old church for a brief farewell service and then walked to the new church. Worship services were held at 10 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Guest speakers were pastors Edward Birkholz, W. Lindloff, A. Fuerstenau, and W. Meier. A dinner and supper were served in the church basement.

The total cost of the new church was \$26,804.49, including \$1,600 for the lots. Pastor Gamm noted in the 1948 history summary that, "In the course of time the property was improved and necessary equipment purchased. Willing hands worked many days to terrace and sod the property. Church furniture and fixtures, such as pulpit, pews and organ were purchased, whereas altar, cross, candelabra, altar covers, altar chairs, baptismal font, chair, davenport and table were donated."⁴⁰

1938 also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the congregation's organization. By this time the congregation had grown significantly. Christ Lutheran now numbered 63 voters, 185 communicants, 314 souls with 106 affiliated families. At this juncture in history, the church council minutes also note that on December 25, 1938, only eight worshippers were present at the German service. The congregation subsequently voted to discontinue holding German services.⁴¹

As Christ Lutheran continued to grow in the next few years, many improvements were made on the church property. In 1939, a colonial style 7-room parsonage was built to the northeast of the church building. The total cost of the parsonage was \$3983. The old parsonage on south fourth street was sold.⁴²

The congregation, however, continued to improve the property. New stained glass windows in the nave, depicting symbols of the four evangelists and Christian doctrines, and a rose window, depicting the twelve apostles, were purchased for \$1800. They were dedicated on November 14, 1943. In 1943, a new seal was made with the congregation's name as "Christ Ev. Lutheran Church." The original German name "The Christus German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" is still used as the official name of the congregation in legal matters.⁴³

In summer of 1946, when Pastor Gamm began suffering with chronic asthma, the congregation decided to grant him a leave of absence. He then spent a year with relatives in Tacoma, Washington. During his one year leave of absence, Pastor Waldemar Geiger of Milroy served the congregation. Concerning Pastor Gamm's struggle with asthma, the annual report of 1948 notes that there was "considerable expression of commendation and gratitude in his resolution and determination to carry-on in spite of his illness." Soon after Pastor Gamm returned, the congregation celebrated the tenth anniversary of the new church building complete with a new chime system, microphones and loudspeakers, and a new carpet in the chancel and down the center aisle. At the 10th anniversary of the church building, Christ Lutheran then numbered 439 souls, coming from 147 families, 291 communicants and 53 voters.⁴⁴

In 1951, the window above the altar was installed, with a member donating \$2600 to cover the cost. Since 1939, a painting depicting Jesus walking on the water with Peter sinking was above the altar. Jesus words from Matthew 14:31 encircled the painting: "O Thou of Little Faith, Wherefore Didst Thou Doubt?" The painting, copied from an illustration in a German Bible, had been done by Roy Olson, a church decorator and member of Christ Lutheran at the time. For the circular stained-glass window which replaced the painting above the altar, the congregation chose the picture of "Jesus praying in Gethsemane," from a list which included, "The Good Shepherd," "Christ Knocking at the Door," "Jesus and Peter," "The Ascension," and "The Transfiguration."⁴⁵

During the 1950's nature provided some of the most difficult problems for Christ Lutheran. Three devastating floods swept through Marshall during a period of seven years. A congregational report in 1958 writes:

During the course of the past seven years floods have troubled us occasionally, the most destructive was in 1951 when the fire department of Hendricks with its pumping equipment emptied our basement of more than three feet of water. The piano was a total loss. In 1952 we were again surrounded by water, so confirmation and Good Friday services were conducted in the High School theatre. In 1957, with more and better equipment we were able to pump out the flooded basement which was at a depth of 21 inches, sufficient to ruin the piano again. The parsonage basement had 30 inches of water.⁴⁶

Pastor Gamm retired in 1969, having served Christ Lutheran for thirty-one of his fifty-two years in the ministry. In that same year, Pastor and Mrs. Gamm also celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. In the service folder commemorating these events, Pastor Gamm wrote:

The material growth of the congregation has not been spectacular, yet it has increased from 178 communicants in 1938 to the present 320... During the course of 31 years, 421 children and adults were baptized, 375 confirmed, 85 united in the bonds of matrimony and 103 departed this life to live with the Savior. Now we bid you farewell in the words of the apostle Paul, Acts 20:32, "and now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."⁴⁷

When Pastor Gamm retired, the local paper did a front page headline story on his ministry.⁴⁸ Pastor Gamm and his wife moved to New Ulm, MN, where Pastor Gamm died on December 27, 1974.

Years of Continuing Growth and Education (1969-1995)

On June 21, 1970, Pastor Donald Seifert of Ceder Rapids, IA was installed as pastor. With the coming of Pastor Seifert, there came a renewed emphasis on Christian education. In a special voter's meeting on October 4, 1970, the congregation decided to offer a Saturday School program for students in grades 5-8. Pastor Seifert gave confirmation instruction to the seventh and eighth grade classes and Mrs. Lois Kruse taught Bible History and related subjects to the fifth and sixth grade.⁴⁹

Saturday School expanded in the autumn of 1971 to accommodate 3-8th grade. Mr. Howard Maertz was called as the Director of Christian Education and began teaching the fifth and sixth grades. Mrs. Kruse was called to instruct third and fourth grades. Classes were held in the church until 1973 when they were moved into a small house next to the parsonage. This small house which the church owned was nicknamed "The Green House" because of the bright green paint which covered its outside walls.⁵⁰

After only a year and one half of ministry at Christ, Pastor Seifert accepted a call to Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, California. One of his children had health problems which forced him to move his family to a warmer climate. Pastor Seifert's farewell was held in December of 1971.⁵¹ After almost a year of vacancy, Pastor William Ziebell from Lake City, MN accepted the call to Marshall and was installed on November 12, 1972.

One of Pastor Ziebell's goals for Christ Lutheran was to get a Lutheran Elementary School started.⁵² In the spring of 1975, a desire to enrich the spiritual education of the congregation's children began to take root. On April 17 of that year, the Self Analysis and Future Planning Committee reported on several building expansion proposals. On June 19, the voters' considered a motion to repair the present church by doing new wiring, tuck pointing and adding a wheel chair ramp; and to purchase land for expansion, specifically seven acres of land across from the high school. This land would eventually be land on which a Christian Day school would be built. The motion was tabled.⁵³

Feeling that the purchase of land would "cripple our ministry," the Church Council and Planning Committee called a meeting on September 28, 1975. The alternative of purchasing the West Bank property (a student union for college students at Southwest State University) on Village Drive, plus four acres of land, at a cost of \$100,000 was presented. This proposal carried.⁵⁴ Christ Lutheran Center, as the West Bank building was first called, was dedicated on April 17, 1977. At the voters meeting a week later, the center was renamed "Samuel hall and School" commemorating the Biblical child, Samuel.⁵⁵

A year later, April 9, 1978, "it was resolved that Christ Lutheran would proceed with the opening of the Christian Day School in the fall of 1978."⁵⁶ Samuel Lutheran School of Christ Lutheran Church opened its doors on August 28, 1978. Sixteen children in grades k-8 were enrolled. All grades were taught by Miss Anna Caskey, a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College. After a building expansion project in 1986, which added three classrooms and a gymnasium the school has grown considerably. Today, the school has around eighty students and five teachers.

Pastor Ziebell accepted a call to teach at Lakeside Lutheran High School, in Lake Mills, WI. Vacancy pastors Pastor David Meyer of Wood Lake and Professor Lloyd Huebner of DMLC served the congregation until August 26, 1979 when Pastor James Cloute of Pierre, South Dakota was installed.

During Pastor Cloute's stay many projects were completed. In 1980, many building repairs and repainting were done on the church building. In 1985, two speakers were purchased for the church and a new Rogers electronic organ was donated to the congregation.

Pastor Cloute accepted a call to Riverview Lutheran Church in Appleton, WI in February 1986. On August 17, 1986, Pastor Dale Schaffer of Alexandria was installed as Christ Lutheran's eighth pastor. Pastor Schaffer served for six years overseeing a school expansion project in 1986, the building of a teacherage in 1987, and a church restoration project in the same year. The total cost of all these projects was nearly \$400,000.⁵⁷

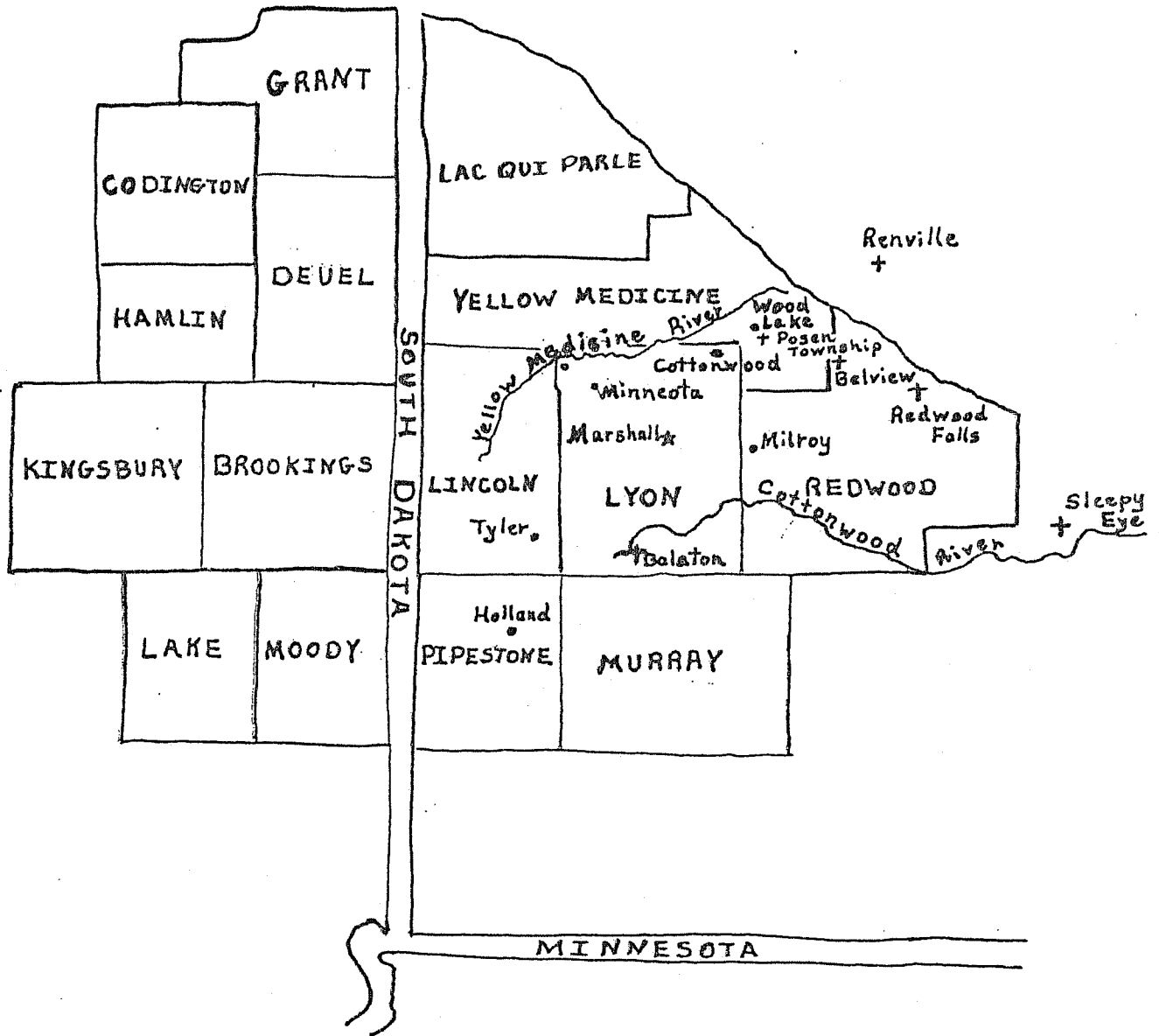
During 1991 and 1992, strife made its way among the members of the congregation concerning the salaries and care of called workers of the congregation.

The issues were discussed at several heated church meetings. On June 5, 1992, Pastor Dale Schaffer resigned as pastor of the congregation citing irreconcilable differences with certain members of the congregation.⁵⁸ During the controversy, Pastor Schaffer felt that the congregation was not supporting the called workers adequately. Others felt that the support was sufficient. The congregation never resolved who was at fault and sadly the controversy ended in the resignation of Pastor Schaffer. Perhaps both sides were to blame for letting the issue grow to the point where the pastor and some members were unable to reconcile their differences.

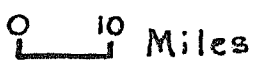
After a long vacancy, Pastor William Ziebell, who served Christ Lutheran in the 1970's accepted a call back to Marshall in the summer of 1993. He was installed on June 13, 1993. Today the congregation stands with a membership of about 700 souls, 520 communicants, 375 families and 90 voters.⁵⁹

The history of Christ Lutheran has seen many ups and downs. Even though Christ Lutheran has seen many leaps forward, several steps backward, and many changes, the one whose name graces the name of the congregation has remained constant and unchanging, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, the history of Christ Lutheran is not really a story about buildings about the pastors and people, but instead the story of what Christ himself has accomplished among many people by the work of his Holy Spirit and through the preaching and teaching of his Word and the administration of his sacraments. And as long as Christ Lutheran is built upon Christ, the cornerstone of the Church, his kingdom will continue to flourish until the Lord Christ returns to live together with his Church forever in glory.

Appendix



MAP KEY


 0 10 Miles

† Preaching stations established and served by Rev. J.J. Hunziker.

COUNTIES named are those to which Pastor Chr. Boettcher traveled to serve 26 preaching places.

ENDNOTES

1. Verhandlungen, Minnesota Synod. 1874, p. 28. Translated from the German by Hildegard Priebe, a present member of Christ Lutheran.
2. Minnesota District History, 1969, p. 268.
3. Lyon County Court House Marriage Records
4. History of Lyon County, by A.P. Rose, 1918, p. 170.
5. Letter from Pastor O.W.C. Boettcher, son of Christian Boettcher, Feb. 5, 1927. This letter is in the possession of Hildegard Priebe, granddaughter of a charter member of the congregation.
6. Ibid.
7. Fiftieth Anniversary of Christ Lutheran Church, 1938. History Folder.
8. Wedding Certificate of Gottlieb Mahnke and Anna Haase. It is in the possession of Lucille Nysten.
9. Pastor Boettchers report to the Minnesota Synod 1879. Verhandlungen Minnesota Synod, 1879, p. 13. Translated from the German by Hildegard Priebe.
10. Pastor Boettcher's 1880 report to the Minnesota Synod.
11. Lyon County Address Records.
12. Interview with Hildegard Priebe, Feb. 25, 1995.
13. Verhandlungen, Minnesota Synode, 1879, p. 34-36.
14. Letter from pastor O.W.C. Boettcher, son of Christian Boettcher, Feb. 5, 1927.
15. Interview with Lucille Nysten, Feb. 25, 1995.
16. Fiftieth Anniversary of Christ Lutheran Church, 1938. History Folder.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Lyon County History, by A.P. Rose, 1918. p. 170.

20. Interview with Hildegard Priebe, Feb. 25, 1995.
21. Interview with Ella Schultz, Feb. 26, 1995.
22. Ibid.
23. Pastor Poethke's Notebooks. Translated from the German by Hildegard Priebe. These notebooks are in the possession of Christ Lutheran Church.
24. Fiftieth Anniversary of Christ Lutheran, 1938. History Folder.
25. Interview with Ella Schultz, Feb. 26, 1995.
26. Fiftieth Anniversary of Christ Lutheran, 1938. History Folder.
27. History of Lyon County, by A.P. Rose, 1918, p. 170.
28. "Vereiches der Gemeinden" in Geschichte der Allg. Ev. Luth. Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1900, p. 365.
29. History of Lyon County, by A.P. Rose, 1918, p. 170.
30. Parochial Report in Proceedings from Minnesota Synod Conventions, 1908-1915.
31. Fiftieth Anniversary of Christ Lutheran, 1938. History Folder.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Interview with Ella Schultz, Feb. 26, 1995.
36. Church Council Minutes, Jan. 21, 1919. Aug. 26, 1925, Jan. 8, 1939.
37. Interview with Lucille Nysten, Feb. 25, 1995.
38. Interview with Leona Schultz, Feb. 26, 1995.
39. Church Council and Voter's Meeting Minutes. 1932-1938.
40. Booklet printed for the Dedication of the new church building, Dec. 11, 1938.
41. Church Council Meeting Minutes, Jan. 8, 1939.

42. Annual Report of Christ Lutheran --1939.
43. Annual Report of Christ Lutheran -- 1943
44. Annual Report of Christ Lutheran -- 1948.
45. Letter from Roy Olson to Trudy Madetzke, Sept. 26, 1988.
46. Annual Report of Christ Lutheran -- 1958.
47. Service Folder for Pastor Gamm's Retirement and Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary, June 9, 1969.
48. *Lyon County Independent*. Wed., April 23, 1969.
49. Voters' Meeting Minutes, Oct. 4, 1970.
50. Voters' Meeting Minutes, Aug. 6, 1971.
51. Folder for Farewell Service of Pastor Seifert, Dec. 16, 1971.
52. Interview with Pastor Ziebell, Mar. 3, 1995.
53. Voters' Meeting Minutes, April 17, June 19, 1975.
54. Voters' Meeting Minutes, Sept. 28, 1975.
55. Voters' Meeting Minutes, April 24, 1977.
56. Voters' Meeting Minutes, April 9, 1978.
57. Christ Lutheran's Annual Report for 1987.
58. Open Letter from Pastor Schaffer to Christ Lutheran congregation, June 5, 1992.
59. Christ Lutheran's Annual Report for 1994.