

Cash to Help Needy

**'Papa' Muehlhaeuser,
Founder of Grace
Lutheran, Was Or-
ganizer of Synod**

Third in a Series

By DAVID A. RUNGE
Of The Journal Staff

A determined figure walked the streets of Milwaukee 110 years ago, a cane over his shoulder and a wooden washstand hanging from the crook end.

It was "Papa" Muehlhaeuser. He had begged the washstand from a furniture dealer and was delivering it to a needy family. "Papa" was the popular name that was given for years to the Rev. John Muehlhaeuser, a German missionary who founded Grace Lutheran church in 1849. Among Milwaukee's early clergymen, there was perhaps none more colorful.

A stern face hid a warm and hospitable heart. In the cholera epidemic of 1851 and 1852, others were afraid to mingle with the patients, but Pastor Muehlhaeuser took them food that he had obtained on daily visits to a hotel kitchen.

There was no organized charity at the time and Pastor Muehlhaeuser, believing that serving a man's soul also meant taking care of his body, was a sort of one man welfare agency.

Banker Favorite Source

It was said that when he wanted money to help a poor family, his favorite source was banker Alexander Mitchell, and that wealthy pioneer, with complete faith in the good pastor, never questioned the need but reached in the cash drawer and handed it over.

In 1863 Pastor Muehlhaeuser helped the Rev. William A. Passavant of Pittsburgh to found Milwaukee hospital, which is observing its 100th anniversary this year.

He is said to have been the first pastor to introduce the Christmas tree as a church decoration here. To this day, Grace church at E. JunEAU av. and Broadway is proud of its annual Christmas display, which includes many trees and garlands of wreaths.

Such was the strength of character of the man of God that for years afterward the church he founded was known less by its own name than as "Muehlhaeuser's kirche."

Helped Form Synod

Pastor Muehlhaeuser met with two others in 1850 to organize the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod, and served as its first president. In that sense Grace church is the "mother" church of the Wisconsin synod, which now has 350,000 members in a number of states, and has its synod headquarters in Milwaukee.

Grace church had a reputation for generosity in mission activities and helped many other Lutheran churches to get started. It drew for support in its early days on some of Milwaukee's wealthiest German families.

came as a gift from the Brumder family. Among those who attended Grace Lutheran school were children in the families of George Brumder and Julius Andrae.

The late Henry L. Grede got all his formal schooling there. Jeweler William H. Upmeyer was treasurer of the congregation for many years and was given credit for inducing members to give according to their means.

Scored Spiritual Attitude

Pastor Muehlhaeuser once remarked that the spiritual condition of the early Germans in Milwaukee was sad. He said many of them were cultured persons but most were rationalistic infidels who took no interest in spiritual matters.

Among the teachers in Grace school were two who later had public schools here named for them. After resigning as prin-



Pastor Muehlhaeuser

cipal of Grace school, Henry O. R. Siefert was a principal and assistant superintendent of public schools.

The other was Paul Binner, who was credited with developing the oral method of teaching the deaf. He established a private school for the deaf that was taken over by the Milwaukee school board in 1896.

In 1865, members of Grace church and St. John's Lutheran church, N. 8th and W. Vliet sts., decided that as city congregations it would be awkward for them to maintain the traditional churchyard burial places. They secured a law from the legislature and appointed trustees to a board that established Union cemetery, and were joined three years later by representatives of Trinity Lutheran church. Later, they also established Grace-land cemetery. Deeds to both the cemeteries are still held by the churches.

Always at Same Site

Grace church always has been at the same site. The first building was replaced in 1900 by the present church of many spires. A traveling member of the congregation saw it pictured in an eastern art gallery as one of the outstanding examples of Gothic architecture in America.

The sense of tradition which has been one of Grace church's strengths developed also as one of its weaknesses. As many of the old timers would admit,

who took over the pulpit last fall after it had been vacant for more than a year, said the average age of the 450 communicants was 48. The membership includes nearly 300 women, about one-third of whom are widows. Only 160 new members have joined in the last 10 years.

Forty-four members live within a half mile of the church. Some drive regularly from Graton, Mequon, Brookfield, Cudahy and Port Washington, revealing the strength of old ties. Pastor Mahanke said.

Drive Is Planned

The congregation, with the 41 year old pastor and Atty. Ralph von Briesen, president of the congregation, at the helm, is planning a vigorous drive for membership growth which will be aimed primarily at the immediate neighborhood.

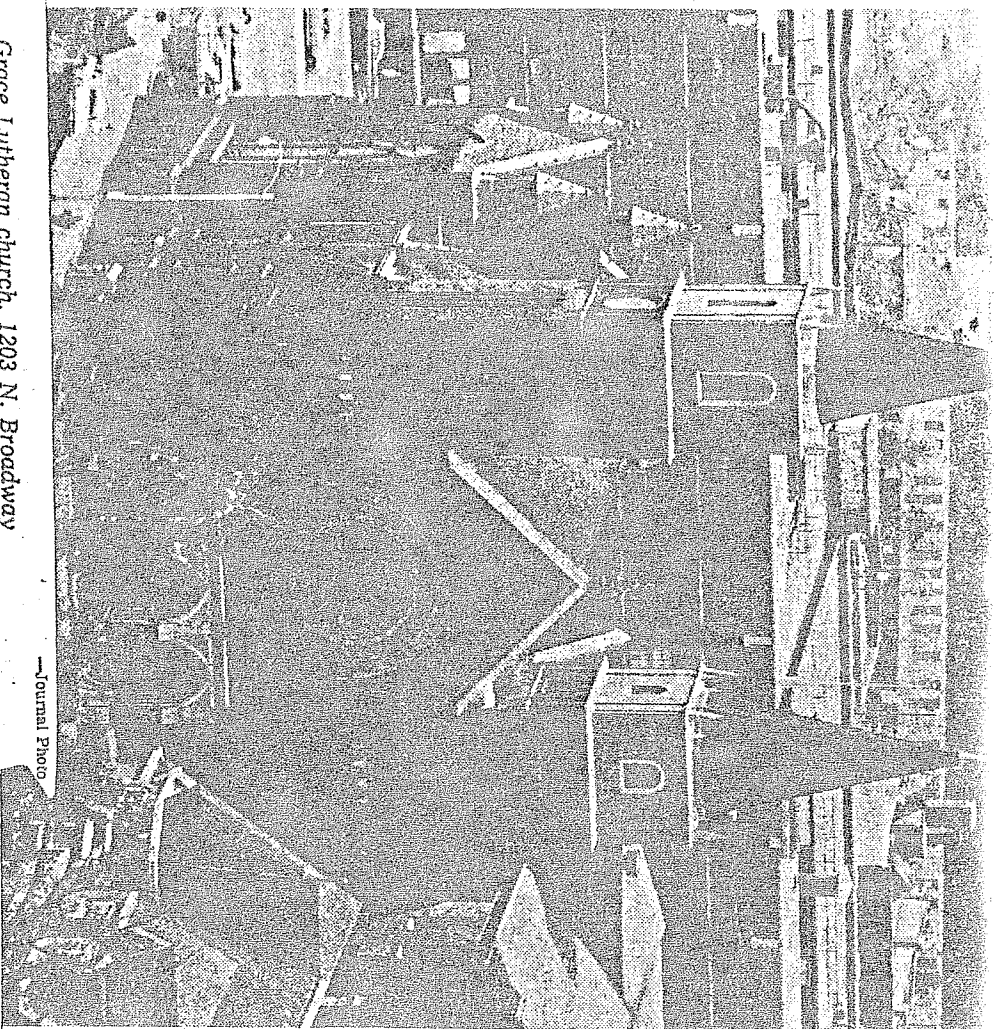
Pastor Mahanke said: "Our first objective will be the apartment dwellers. Surveys indicate that about 70% of them 'sleep in' on Sunday morning.

"Our future is clouded somewhat by the fact that the church is in an urban renewal area and residents are uncertain about what the future holds.

"A few Puerto Ricans and Negroes attend services from time to time but none of them has joined. We hope some will."

The old parochial school next to the church was closed in 1933. The space was rented for outside purposes for a number of years. Plans are not definite, but the building might be torn down to provide parking space.

"We think we have just the man to fill our needs in Pastor Mahanke," the congregation's president said.



Grace Lutheran church, 1203 N. Broadway

—Journal Photo

Churches of the Old East Side Members Move, Church Doesn't

By ALICIA ARMSTRONG
Of The Journal Staff

With characteristic determination and industry, Germans nation and industry, Germans of Milwaukee built Grace Lutheran church on the near east side.

And it has refused to budge. Although most of the members long ago moved to other areas, the congregation has continued to worship at Broadway and Juneau for 116 years.

(The first building was built there in 1851. It was replaced in 1900 by the present Gothic structure of many spires.)

The Rev. John Muehlhaeuser, who came here as a missionary to the Germans, was the first

pastor of Grace church which was organized in a hall on the northwest corner of Juneau and 3rd.

That corner has been the location of the West Side bank for many years. Now, just a block to the east, there stands a forest of pillars that will support freeway bridges.

Headed Synod

Pastor Muehlhaeuser also was the first president of Die Erste Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Wisconsin (the First Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin).

The synod, which later changed its name to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod, is theologically the most conservative of the large Lutheran bodies in the United States.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser said the spiritual condition of Germans in Milwaukee at the middle of the last century was "very sad."

He noted that there were a number of cultured persons in the young city, but that "most of them were rationalistic infidels and many took no interest in spiritual matters."

Had Many Interests

Pastor Muehlhaeuser, on the other hand, took interest in a number of matters.

C. T. Wetstein, one of Milwaukee's earliest residents, wrote of Pastor Muehlhaeuser in reminiscences contributed many years ago to the old Evening Wisconsin.

Wetstein said the minister "spent his leisure hours in visiting the poor and the afflicted."

During an epidemic of a deadly disease here in the early 1850s, Pastor Muehlhaeuser provided food to victims.

Wetstein said the pastor visited the sick daily and was unafraid, "though most of the people of Milwaukee were terribly scared."

Banker Always Listened

Pastor Muehlhaeuser also went to banker Alexander Mitchell when he needed money to help the poor. "Mr. Mitchell would accept his judgment as to what was needed and give him the required amount," Wetstein said.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser also was instrumental in founding Milwaukee hospital, now called Lutheran Hospital of Milwaukee.

During its first year, Grace congregation was supported by a Lutheran society for American inland missions. Pastor Muehlhaeuser also went east to collect funds to build a church.

Soon, a number of industrious and thrifty parishioners had established themselves in the community and were able to contribute liberally for the support of charity and religion.

Only Six Pastors

Such was the impact of "the missionary" on Grace church that for years after its founding it was known less by its own name than as "Muehlhaeuser's kirche."

The Rev. Elmer A. Mahanke, the present minister, is only the sixth pastor of Grace church.

Pastor Muehlhaeuser was its minister until his death in 1867. His next two successors died in the church building — both apparently of heart attacks. The Rev. Theodor Jaekel (1868-1906) was stricken while conducting a catechism class, and the Rev. Carl Gausewitz (1906-1927) collapsed just before the start of a service.

Pastor Mahanke, who has been pastor since 1962, said that 25% of the church's members now lived within two miles of the church, while some of the rest lived as far away as South Milwaukee, New Berlin, Brookfield and Graton. (The church has about 500 baptized members and 426 communicant members.)

To show how scattered the parishioners are, Pastor Mahanke pointed out that members live in 41 postal zones.

Many Follow Tradition

Who are these people? Many, the minister noted, are "second or third or fourth generation members."

"That is real loyalty!" he added.

He said he believed that the church was at a very important location "because so many young people who have just come to the 'big city,' come to this part of town." He added: "They are taking their first steps completely on their own."

At this particular time, it is of the utmost importance to have a place readily available where they may worship.

"There are enough hindrances as well as temptations and natural excuses to prevent them from keeping a contact with the church.

"Experience teaches us that if they do not do something about their religion immediately, they soon are lost to the church permanently."