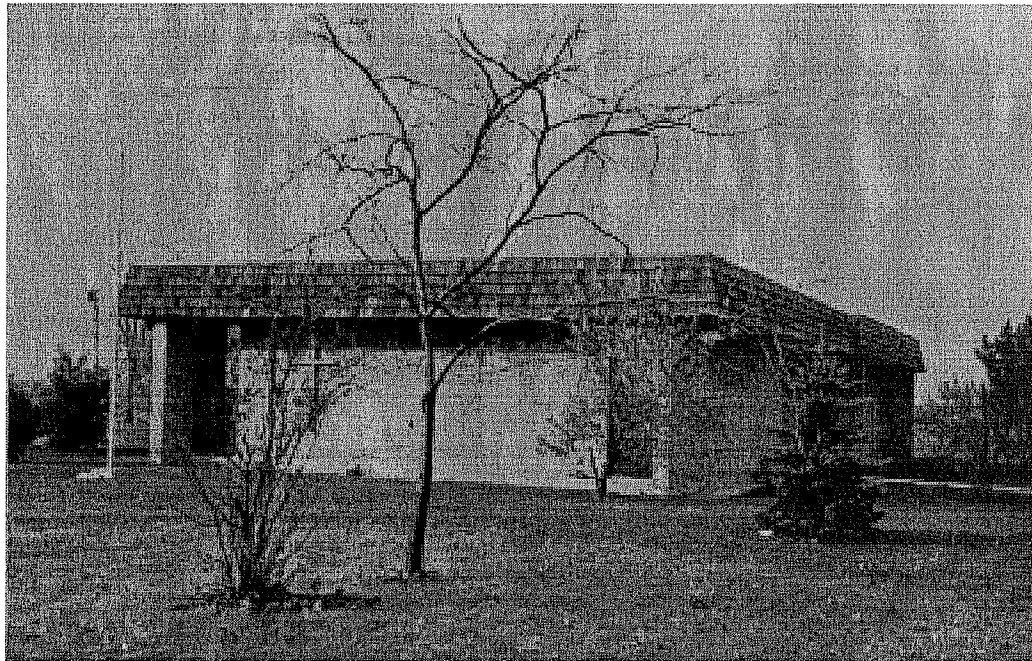


**The History of Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran
School**

"We taught our students well."



Scott A. Muske
Section B
4/17/00

The purpose of a Christian day school is to give children a good, solid, Christ-centered education. I have come to realize that this is precisely what went on at Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School, short lived though it was. This became very apparent to me while interviewing Mrs. Carroll Lorenzen. When I asked her, "What was the greatest accomplishment of the school?" she responded, "We taught our students well."¹ I soon realized that I had the sub-title for this history. But, although the students of Saint John's School were taught well, the school began closing its doors in 1992.

What happened between 1966, when the first class was held, to 1992, when the end had already set in? To properly answer that question, it is necessary to look at Saint John's school as a living entity, an entity with a life that burned out in twenty-six short years. With that in mind the following divisions will be followed in this history:

Conceived in Love; Born in Fire; Blessed in Spite of Itself; Death of Natural Causes.

As with any lifetime, there will be lessons to be learned, moments of joy, times of sorrow, and things one might wish he could do different. It is not the purpose of this history to dredge up buried emotions or to point fingers. Rather, it is my sincere prayer that the lessons to be learned from the history of Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School be used to educate and inspire generations yet to come.

Conceived in Love

What happened between 1966 and 1992? The answer to that question goes back to a time when Saint John's worshiped in a log cabin. The year was 1861. This note concerning a Christian day school was included in the 1976 church directory. "In the

¹ Lorenzen, Carroll, personal interview, 3/27/00.

105th year of its history Saint John's attained a goal which from its very beginnings were envisioned by the founding families – a Christian day school.”²

But it was not until the arrival of Pastor Frederick Knueppel that the goal began to come to the foreground. It appears that already in the late 1950s Pastor Knueppel could see the need for outreach and evangelism in a changing Mequon. No matter how one felt about it, the area was soon to become a suburb of Milwaukee. However, the thought of becoming a suburb of Milwaukee did not sit well with some of the long time members of the congregation. But in spite of that fact, there does not seem to have been any resistance to the idea that a Christian education arm of the church was needed, and needed to be used as an evangelism tool.³

It was in the congregational voters meeting of July 15, 1959 that the feasibility of a parochial school was first discussed. “Motion made by Norbert Netz, second by Art Schroeder to look into the feasibility of starting a parochial school by the start of the second 100 years. Ballot vote requested – Voting was as follows. 19 yes; 3 no; 1 blank.”⁴ It was at this same meeting that the first education committee was formed. The three men who were given the task of looking into the feasibility of a parochial school and reporting to the congregation were Norbert Netz, Art Schroeder, and Kermit Schuenert.⁵

It appears that the support needed to begin such a venture was there, or at least the interest was. The motivation for starting the school was indeed admirable. There were children in the congregation that needed a Christian education, the area surrounding Saint

² Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church and School, directory, 1976, p. 5.

³ Siegel, Pastor Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

Guidinger, LeRoy, personal interview, 3/30/00.

⁴ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 7/15/59.

John's was turning into an evangelism field, and the congregation had the desire to fulfill the dream of their forefathers. But for all the good intentions and initial support, a zeal for a parochial school of their own was about to run headlong into opposition. The idea of Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School was indeed conceived in love, but her birth would tear the congregation apart.

Born in Fire

The first inklings of how things would proceed came on the heels of the newly formed education committee's first report. The committee wasted no time in returning to the voters with their recommendation.

To the voters of Saint John's Ev. Luth. Church of East Mequon assembled in lawful meeting Oct. 21st 1959.

Whereas we have been instructed to look into the feasibility to establish a Christian Day School for our Children;

Whereas there are at present more than fifty children of school age within the congregation;

Whereas we are convinced that it is our Christian duty and pleasing to our Heavenly Father to give these children every opportunity to feed upon the green pastures of his word in their most impressive years;

Whereas the Christian Day School has proved to be a boon in mission work to those congregations which have established them

Whereas a survey of eligible school children was taken some years ago and revealed a favorable number of interested parents; we deem the erection of a Christian Day School a worthy Memorial of God's great grace to us during the past century.

Whereas the present property is too restricted for the erection of a school;

Whereas twenty acres more or less are obtainable bordering our present property to the north;

Whereas we have ten thousand dollars available to us, interest free, for the purchase of the property, for the purpose of erecting a school.

We recommend to the congregation here assembled to purchase the property for that purpose.

Respectfully submitted,
The Committee,
Norbert Netz, chairman
Art Schroeder, Secretary
Kermit Scheunert⁶

⁵ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 7/15/59.

⁶ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 10/21/59.

The reaction that followed this recommendation does not reflect the majority vote that the school received in its conception. But it does reflect the split that was already beginning to form in the congregation. There also seems to have been a lapse in protocol that might have resulted in the school being built at a much earlier date.

It has been indicated to me that the congregation was divided over the issue of building the school. It is estimated that the congregation was evenly split on the issue, complete with all the jockeying for position that would go along with such a rift.⁷

As far as the breach in protocol goes, it was moved and seconded to accept the previously mentioned recommendation of the educational committee, but no vote was called, and the motion was never tabled. Rather, a new motion was formed in the same October 21, 1959 meeting.

Moved by Herbert Klapperick, second by Robert Gotthart to refer this matter back to the committee. Motion carried.

Moved by Elroy Wessel second by Henry Luedtke that the committee bring back a survey report.

No 1 – How many families are interested in starting a parochial school.

No 2 – How many eligible children are there of the present families, and how many families without children who are interested in supporting this school.

No 3 – A breakdown of figures – Report on the maintenance of such a school. Pastor and teacher salaries and how much would each communicant member have to contribute.

No 4 – How much high land is available to the north of the present church property.

No 5 – How much tuition would it cost to send our children to Calvary.

Two more men were then placed on the educational committee, Ray Clausung and Herbert Klapperick, to aid in collecting this data.⁸

The voters meeting notes show that this motion passed and effectively scuttled the early movement to build a parochial school to the north of the church, and the seeds of dissent⁹ began to sprout. It is, however, noteworthy that the minutes for these meetings have been recorded in a very evangelical tone, and even to date as I interviewed the

⁷ Filter, Roland; Personal Interview, 4/3/00.

people who lived through those early days, every effort was taken to keep from breaking the eighth commandment. However, this does not change the fact that ground would not be broken for another seven years. The congregation was split.

More evidence of this came in the January 15, 1961 voters meeting.

“Moved by George Dallman second by Hubert Klapperick to take each Christian Day School recommendation separately.

Moved by LeRoy Guidinger second by Clarence Maul to accept recommendation No. 1 – Do we want to start a school building fund?

Moved by Hubert Klapperick second by Arthur Kiekhaefer to decide this recommendation by ballot. Result by ballot yes 24; no 12.

Moved by Roland Lederer second by Clarence Gier to vote on recommendation No 2 – Shall we establish a voluntary tuition fund yes 21; no 19.”⁹

It is the outcome of the ballot votes that is particularly telling here. In 1959, when the idea was first proposed for feasibility, the vote was 19 to 3 in favor of the idea. Now, the vote to establish a building fund is 24 to 12 and the vote concerning tuition was 21 to 19 in favor. Although each of the votes was in favor of the issues relating to Christian education, the margin was closing fast.

The stalemate over the issue of the school would continue for several years. The next event of interest concerning the birth of the school involves the land that the school is currently standing on. In the voters meeting of September 5, 1962, the congregation turned down the chance to purchase the land the school is currently standing on and the original teacherage, from Mr. Haggerty, for the price of \$19,900. The minutes list four reasons:

1. Price too high
2. Not enough land for future planning
3. Possible sewerage problem coming up
4. Land of no use unless purchasing lot next to this on the west to the corner, price \$3,500.¹⁰

⁸ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, 10/21/59.

⁹ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, 1/15/61.

¹⁰ Voters Meeting Minutes, Saint John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, 9/5/62.

In the years that followed, the stalemate atmosphere continued. Neither those who were in favor of a school nor those who opposed it had enough support to settle the matter. However, this doesn't mean that nothing was accomplished in these years. In 1963 playground equipment was donated to the congregation, and in 1964 a new school committee was formed.¹¹

But Pastor Knueppel, the man who had spearheaded the project, would not see his efforts bear fruit. On September 13, 1964 the church council granted Pastor Knueppel a peaceful dismissal in order that he might accept a call to Sturgis, Michigan.¹² But the school project continued.

In October of 1964, The Harold Aleroge Architect Company was selected to draw up plans for the school.¹³

Then, in May of 1965 Saint John's was blessed with a new pastor, Reginald Pope. Also in May of 1965 the congregation once again had an opportunity to purchase the land and house to the west of the church. Financing was considered, and it appears that the land was in fact purchased at this time.¹⁴

Then on October 13, 1965 the following resolution was passed by the church council: "It is recommended by the Board of Trustees to the congregation that the need for a school is now. The recommendation has been arrived at after many hours of discussion and analyzing the needs of a Christian Day School."¹⁵

¹¹ Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 1/12/64.

¹² Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 9/13/64.

¹³ Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 10/14/64.

¹⁴ Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 5/5/65.

¹⁵ Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 10/13/65.

The minutes for the actual voters meeting in which this recommendation was voted on were not found. However, a note written in the hand of Pastor Pope was found that reads, “Motion to establish Day School, January 1966.” In the course of interviewing congregation members, numerous references were made to a voters meeting that was crucial to the building of the school. In this meeting a vote was taken to decide whether or not to build. I have been told by numerous sources that the vote was, “not a landslide”, “close”, and “a one vote margin.”¹⁶ It appears that the motion referred to by Pastor Pope in his note is the same motion alluded to as being a “close vote.”

If this is in fact the case, a wise choice of action would have been to move that the vote be made unanimous, or simply table the issue until a broader base of support could be secured. There is no record in the council minutes or in my interviews that either of those things happened. The majority vote was taken as a mandate to build the school. For better or worse, Saint John’s Evangelical Lutheran School was born, amid some hard feelings and a divided congregation.

In March of 1966 it was reported to the church council that the school board had called a teacher for the school. That teacher was Ms. Ruth Westendorf.



Figure 1: Ms. Ruth Westendorf

¹⁶ Personal interviews with Pastor Randall Siegel 4/4/00, Lawrence Meier 3/30/00, and Roland Filter 4/3/00.

Then on August 28, 1966 ground was broken for Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School. Freiburg Construction Company would build the school at a cost appraised at \$59,500. Those present at the ground breaking were the members of the *Building Committee*: John Kranawitter, chairman; John Petersen, secretary; Jack Cziany; Elmer Gierach; and John Laabs – the members of the *School Board*: Roland Filter, chair; George Lederer, secretary; Carl Burhop; Donald Groth (1966); and LeRoy Guidinger (1966) – the members of the *Church Council*: Arthur Schroeder, president; Walter Boek, vice president; Gilbert Guidinger, secretary; Douglas Marr, treasurer; Henry Achterberg, financial secretary; Walter Riemer, cemetery custodian; Donald Bath, treasurer; Harvey Lederer, president (1966); and Marvin Lenz, secretary (1966).¹⁷ These men are pictured below in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Ground breaking for Saint Johns Evangelical Lutheran School

Blessed in Spite of Itself

After ground was broken and the school was built, God showered his grace upon this school in abundance. The Lord blessed Saint John's school in many ways, not the least of which was being able to carry out its mission of providing a Christian education

¹⁷ Notes taken from commemorative plaque in Saint John's Ev. Lutheran School, 1966.

to its students. In spite of the school's rocky start and limited support, the Lord used it as a tool to accomplish his will.

Before the school building was complete, classes were held in the council room of the church. Saint John's first teacher, Ms. Westendorf, taught these classes. In the school's first year of operation, grades 1 and 2 were offered. The school's census was 18, and classes remained in the council room for one year until the school building was completed.¹⁸ The new facility was dedicated in March 1967.¹⁹

Following the completion of the new facility the Lord continued to bless the school and in marvelous ways. For example, Saint John's School was the first school in the district to be completely carpeted. At the time the decision was made, it required a great deal of discussion. But the extra cost of putting in carpet turned out to be a huge blessing. Carpeting was chosen over asbestos flooring. God was looking out for his school because later the need to remove the asbestos tiles would have been costly.²⁰

It is also of interest that Saint John's school never suffered from a disease outbreak of any kind that can be remembered. Other than the occasional flu and common cold, this carpeted two-room school remained in good health for its entire history.

Also, just as children grow, so grew the school. In the fall of 1968, a pre-kindergarten class was added and was taught temporarily by Mrs. Pope.²¹ Carroll Lorenzen came to Saint John's in April of 1969 to serve as a second teacher and assumed teaching pre-school as one of her responsibilities.²² The pre-school was very successful and was the first of its kind in the Mequon area.

¹⁸ Guidinger, LeRoy, personal interview, 3/30/00.

¹⁹ Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church and School, directory, 1976, p. 6.

²⁰ Lorenzen, Carroll, personal interview, 3/27/00.

²¹ Council Meeting Minutes, Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church, 5/8/68.



Figure 3: Mrs. Lorenzen and class

Saint John's school continued to grow, and it added classes each year until pre-school, kindergarten, and grades 1 through 8 were offered. In addition to a basic curriculum, art classes were offered. These classes offered a break from the normal classroom routine. They were taught by Lenae Lederer in a special, remodeled, classroom in the barn adjacent to the school. This break was an advantage to both the students and the teachers, who used the extra space and time for other courses.²³

But the blessings the Lord poured out on Saint John's school did not stop there. In addition to Ms. Westendorf and Mrs. Lorenzen, Saint John's was also served by three principals in its short life. A complete listing of all the teachers and principals is as follows:²⁴

Ruth Westendorf	June 1966 – 1970	from Dr. Martin Luther College, graduated 1966
Carroll Lorenzen	April 1969 – present	
Daniel Feuerstahler (principal)	August 1970 – 1974	from Dr. Martin Luther College, graduated 1969
Paul E. Wachholz (principal)	August 1974 – 1977	from Jerusalem Ev. Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI
Lawrence Meier (principal)	August 1977 – 1992	from Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church Waukesha, WI

²² Pope, Reginald, personal notes.

²³ Lorenzen, Carroll, personal interview, 3/27/00.

²⁴ Pope, Reginald, personal notes.

The Lord not only blessed Saint John's with opportunities for the students to grow in wisdom and faith but also in the areas of sports and school pride. The school always had an athletic field, which was wisely equipped as an undersized soccer field. This field was enjoyed by Saint John's students on a regular basis and by others during rally days.

However, one of the real sources of athletic competition and school pride was the basketball team. Saint John's was too small to field a team entirely on its own, so they joined forces with Saint Mark's in Brown Deer and a little later with Pilgrim in Menomonee Falls. This combined team competed under the mascot name "Lions", derived from Saint Mark's, and managed some notable successes in spite of its small size. The most notable of these was the Northwestern Prep School Invitational. The combined team, fielded primarily by Saint John's and Saint Mark's, won the first two championships of the tournament's history. This was accomplished in spite of the fact that the combined team had to practice on the Brown Deer public school grounds.²⁵ Pictured below is one of the games the Saint John's-Saint Mark's Lions played against Garden Homes.

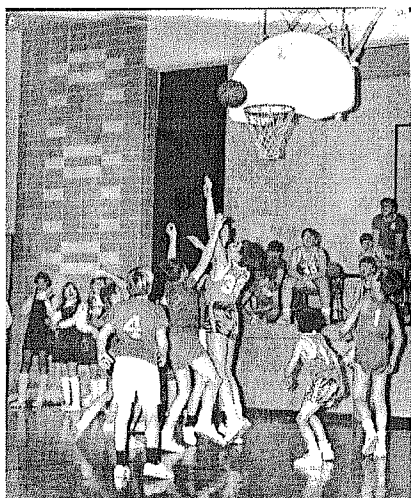


Figure 4: Basketball game against Garden Homes

²⁵ Meier, Lawrence, personal interview, 3/30/00.
Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School was richly blessed in what it was able to accomplish. The greatest accomplishment expressed in the interviews I conducted was ^{st a fact} worded best by Pastor Siegel, "Heaven will have more people there, because we were here."²⁶ This statement is very telling where the mission of the school is concerned and in what people hoped to accomplish. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:31, "Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" Of all the things that could have been remembered and boasted over as great accomplishments, the blessing and privilege of sharing God's Word with children is Saint John's school's greatest accomplishment.

The Lord would not allow that accomplishment to go unblessed. The Lord worked his Word in the hearts of the students so that from little Saint John's, sons and daughters of the congregation continued their education in Lutheran schools, and some went on to enter the public ministry. Indeed, they taught their students well.²⁷

Death of Natural Causes

But, some division in the congregation still existed, and it began to eat away at the school. Although from the outside it may have simply looked like the problem at Saint John's school was a lack of students and a declining birth rate,²⁸ the real problem ran much deeper.

It is true that the school never received total support from the congregation, and some families chose not to send their children to Saint John's for a variety of reasons.²⁹ This could have been a manifestation of the division in the congregation over the school

²⁶ Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

²⁷ Lorenzen, Carroll, personal interview, 3/27/00.

²⁸ Meier, Lawrence, personal interview, 3/30/00.

²⁹ Filter, Roland, personal interview, 4/3/00.

or simply the signs of a changing economy and neighborhood. Whichever was the case, the decline in census was only at best, a part of the problem.

The other part of the problem was confusion over the doctrine of church, mission, and ministry. It was the practice and policy of the congregation to keep the church and school separate, and that policy manifested itself in several ways. For example, first, the key to the school facility was originally withheld from the pastor. Second, a switch was made in the school's curriculum from the King James version of the bible to the New International Version, without the pastor's knowledge or input, which impacted catechism instruction. Third, there was disagreement over the application of this doctrine between the pastor and the principal.³⁰

In my estimation, both men felt that they were fulfilling the roles to which they had been called, and for their zeal, both men are to be commended. However, one must keep in mind that this disagreement was only one of the factors resulting from the confusion over the doctrine of church, mission, and ministry. There was a two headed bureaucracy in place which resulted in the church and school functioning as complete independent entities. One must also keep in mind that the pastor of a congregation can not fulfill his call if a segment of the congregation is being withheld from his care. This was a conflict of interest that had to be resolved.

Unfortunately, a conflict of this type cannot occur without impacting the congregation. Some members left the congregation because balance between mission offerings and home purposes had been lost. Members also left the church due to the

³⁰ Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

“whole situation” regarding the closing of the school, at least for a time, and in general there was not a warm feeling in the congregation.³¹

Attempts were made at gaining a proper understanding of the doctrine and at fostering a healthy working relationship between the pastor and principal. These two men worked with the Parish Services division of the Wisconsin Synod to this end until 1985. However, in the summer of 1992 all efforts made by the pastor, principal and congregation boards to apply this doctrine properly, were cut short.³²

Principle Meier accepted a call to Saint Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran School to serve as principal. Although his departure ended the immediate need for gaining a greater understanding of the doctrine of church, mission, and ministry, it also put the congregation in a bind. It was already past the date for calling a teacher from the field, and the congregation could not secure a graduate from Dr. Martin Luther College.³³

After significant discussion concerning the issue of the school and its future on July 15, 1992, the voters reconvened on July 29, 1992 to consider two possible plans.

Plan ‘A’ was to continue classes at Saint John’s as before and issue a call to fill the vacancy of Mr. Meier.

Plan ‘B’ was to discontinue grades 5-8 at Saint John’s and offer tuition support for the affected families/students for them to utilize another school with which we are in fellowship. The grades K-4 would be retained at Saint John’s with Mrs. Lorenzen as teacher. Pre-K would move to the school building and be conducted in the classroom vacated by grades 5-8.³⁴

Before the two plans could be discussed adequately, a motion was made by Mr. Becker and seconded by Clay Hill to call a teacher/principal. The vote was 3 yes, 14 no,

³¹ Filter, Roland, personal interview, 4/3/00.

³² Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

³³ Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

³⁴ Voter’s Meeting Minutes, Saint John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, 7/29/92.

with 1 abstention. Plan “A” would not be implemented. Plan “B” would be implemented and would not be a one-year commitment.³⁵

This marked the beginning of a “downsizing” for the school. That year, grades 5 through 8 went to Calvary, and within three years all that would remain of Saint John’s Evangelical Lutheran School would be the pre-school.³⁶

Closing Comments

The school was no more and, in a way, a part of the congregation died with it. But even in the face of the current situation, the Lord continues to bless. In the closing years of the school, Principle Meier’s family outgrew their home and were provided with a larger home at 11224 N. Valley Drive. This left the farmhouse on the church property vacant. The congregation opted to get a seminary assistant and let him and his family live in the home in exchange for his services. This is an arrangement that continues to this day and has been a blessing to both the church and the seminary.³⁷

The continuing blessings of the Lord are also seen in what the people I interviewed wanted preserved in this history. More than anything else, people wanted it documented that if the day comes that the school reopens, in some fashion, they would support that decision. During its years of operation, a real love and zeal for doing the Lord’s work through Christian education was fostered and remains. That is a blessing. But of all the bits of advice and hopes for the future that people expressed, I feel that this quote sums up the spirit of Saint John’s and the desires of its members: “Trust that the Lord will bless.”³⁸

³⁵ Voter’s Meeting Minutes, Saint John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, 7/29/92.

³⁶ Lorenzen, Carroll, personal interview, 3/27/00.

³⁷ Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

³⁸ Siegel, Randall, personal interview, 4/4/00.

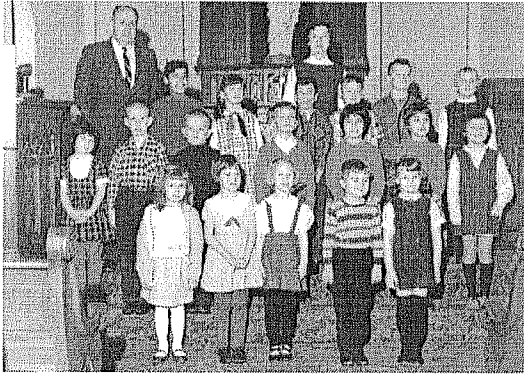
It is that mind set, that truth, that lies behind the fact that, in a way, the school is not dead but lives on in the pre-school. For, if the greatest accomplishment of Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran School was the training of children in the true faith, then that accomplishment continues to be met with each new school year. The Word is still taught, and children still attend. Saint John's may remain a pre-school until the Lord returns, or it may one day reopen its doors to all eight grades. Whatever the future holds, whatever educational decisions might have to be made, may we all trust that the Lord will bless, and remember these familiar words:

Brothers and sisters go in peace.
Live in harmony with one another.
Serve the Lord with gladness.³⁹

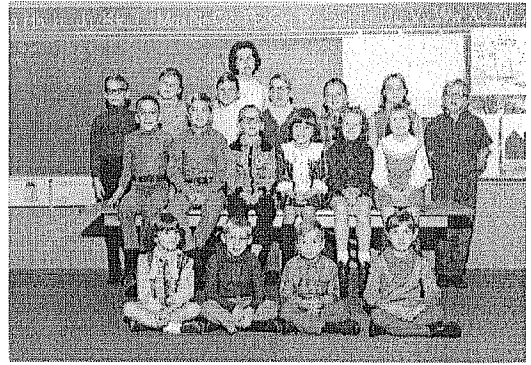
³⁹ Christian Worship, A Lutheran Hymnal (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 37.

Appendix

The following are school photographs donated to this project by congregation members.



Classes of 66-67 school year



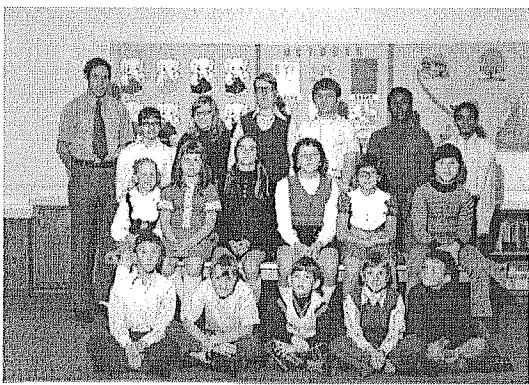
Classes of 70-71 school year



Classes of 71-72 school year



Classes of 72-73 school year



Classes of 73-74 school year



Classes of 74-75 school year

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