

*A History of Siloah Lutheran Church*

*1894-1994*

*by*

*Michael J. Otterstatter*

*Senior Church History  
Prof. Brenner  
March 30, 1994*

## **The Early Years**

***In 1893 pastor August Bendler of St. Matthew Lutheran Church and pastor Adolph Baebenroth of Salem Lutheran Church began to do mission work in the then sparsely settled area north of Milwaukee, where Siloah is currently located. Since a church would provide an obvious attraction for settlers, William Spense, a developer, donated two lots situated on what is now the northeast corner of North Twenty-first and West Nash Streets. Before a church could be organized Pastor Bendler held services in the town school barracks. After five or six weeks, however, the school board ruled that it was illegal to hold church services on public property. Carl Koester, who later became a member of Siloah, offered his home for services until other arrangements could be made. During the following months the small group of Christians began to grow in number, and on March 5, 1894, with Pastors Bendler, Knuth, and Baebenroth in attendance, Siloah was born. A certificate of organization, under the name "Evangelical Lutheran Siloah's Church of the Town of Milwaukee, Wisconsin," was signed by five charter members and recorded in the Register of Deeds Office in Milwaukee on March 31, 1894.***

**In 1894 a frame church was erected on the donated lots at a cost of \$2000.00, with August Hoffmeister as contractor. The money for this project was secured from individuals in the form of loans. The Gemeindeblatt of January 15, 1895 reported the dedication as follows:**

**On the third Sunday in Advent, December 16, 1894, the newly organized Siloah Congregation in Milwaukee was privileged to dedicate its recently erected church, located in the vicinity of the Union Cemetery, to the service of the Triune God. The service began**

***at 10:00 AM. Pastor Opitz performed the dedicatory act and preached on John 9:1-10, choosing for his theme: "Siloah, a Spring of Blessing of the Triune God."***

***The Male Choir and the Wartburg Band of St. Matthew contributed to the joy of the occasion.***

***The prospects for growth were not at all good for Siloah during the first years of its existence. The church stood in an isolated area surrounded by farms and truck gardens. There were only a few roads at this time so members would often have to wade through mud and water on their way to Siloah. The little flock was confronted by disappointments, hardships, and a treasury which was usually empty. Under such trying circumstances it was neither advisable nor possible for the congregation to call a resident pastor. In the meantime pastors Knuth and Opitz conducted services and attended to the spiritual needs of the members. The slow settlement of the community and the resulting lack of growth of the congregation made it necessary to depend upon the financial support of the Wisconsin Synod for many years.***

#### **The First Pastor**

**On February 10, 1895, Rev. Otto Hoenecke, who only six months earlier had been installed at North Trinity, was called to serve as Siloah's pastor. He accepted the call and was installed by Pastor Opitz on February 24, 1895, but also continued to serve as pastor of North Trinity. Siloah had to be content with Sunday afternoon services, since the lack of decent transportation made it impossible for Pastor**

*Hoenecke to conduct services at both congregations in the morning. This arrangement was less than ideal and did not encourage good attendance. On one occasion, after walking the distance from North Trinity to Siloah, Pastor Hoenecke met with the disappointment of not finding anyone willing to come and hear him preach.*

*Just before pastor Hoenecke accepted a call to Bethel Lutheran Church in March of 1898, Siloah finally showed some signs of growth when nine new members joined. During the vacancy pastors Eber and Knuth attended to the needs of the small congregation.*

#### *A New Pastor and a School*

*Because the community around Siloah was beginning to grow the congregation decided to start a Christian grade school. In July of 1898, Rudolph Jeske, a seminary graduate, was installed by pastor Bendler. Pastor Jeske became the first resident pastor of Siloah and the first teacher of its elementary school. He also served as pastor of North Trinity. At this time it was financially impossible for the congregation to erect a parsonage, since the church building had to be enlarged to provide for a school room. Members of the congregation shared their living quarters with Pastor Jeske in the meantime. After great sacrifice on the part of the small membership the school was dedicated on August 14, 1898. A charge of fifty cents per child, per month, was voted upon to help meet the operating cost of the school.*

*It was during pastor Jeske's pastorate, in November of 1899, that Siloah applied for membership with the Wisconsin Synod. The congregation felt obligated and privileged to assume its share of the work in the organization to which it owed its existence, and upon which it would be dependent for support for years to come. Official notification of Siloah's reception into the synod was received on July 1, 1900.*

### *Continued Growth*

*Under pastor Jeske's leadership the membership of Siloah increased to about fifty souls. Then in the fall of 1900 he accepted a call to serve congregations at Zumbrota and Minneola, Minnesota. Pastor C. Auerswald, of Ludington, Michigan, was then called and installed in November of 1900, by pastor Bandler. He served until March, 1901, when he resigned and was succeeded by pastor Herman Hoffmann. He served as pastor and teacher until December, 1903, when illness prompted his resignation. Once again the congregation was faced with the necessity of finding a man to carry on the successful work of his predecessors.*

### *Pastor Lieberum*

*Candidate, Carl Lieberum, was called from the seminary on December 13, 1903, and installed by pastor T. Gensicke on January 3, 1904. He live in rented quarters until the construction of a parsonage, adjoining the church, was completed in July of 1904. At this time many new sub-divisions were opening in*

*the area, resulting in street improvements and the construction of new homes. Pastor Lieberum eagerly took advantage of the new mission field unfolding around Siloah. During the early years of his pastorate the congregation grew steadily, so that on May 16, 1909, Siloah was able to become self-supporting. In this same year, through the efforts of the Male Choir, electric lighting was installed in the church and a bell was purchased with special contributions from members. This faithful bell still rings on Sunday mornings.*

#### ***A Teacher Called***

*As Siloah's membership grew and the attendance at the school increased the congregation decided it was time to call a full time teacher. This would give the pastor more time to do mission work in the rapidly growing community. Edwin Strauss, from the teacher's seminary of the synod, accepted the call extended to him and was installed on July 3, 1910. The school enrollment increased to fifty pupils under Mr. Strauss. In 1910 he was succeeded by Carl Pape, another graduate, who served the congregation for one year. Then pastor Lieberum again took over the teaching duties at Siloah's school.*

#### ***School Discontinued***

*The enrollment in the day school was seriously affected by the construction of public schools in the community. This fact, coupled with the constant increase of work for the pastor resulted in a resolution by the congregation in 1919 to*

*discontinue the school. It would be forty years before Siloah would once again open a Lutheran elementary school.*

### ***New Church Planned***

*In the same year that the school was closed, the congregation began to address the need for a new church building. With the community rapidly growing and the congregation's membership increasing it was clear that the current facilities would not be adequate for long. On March 2, 1919 a building fund was started and on May 4, the four lots, on which the present church is located were purchased. Because the church and school hall were still not provided with adequate plumbing facilities it was necessary to secure a permit from the city each year to continue public use of the building. As the city began to pressure the congregation to install more modern facilities the sentiment grew to move the building to the newly acquired lots on the northwest corner of the intersection and to remodel the church there. Since Pease Street, now West Nash Street, had not been paved, the congregation petitioned the city for permanent street improvements, whereupon, on May 11, 1922, it was definitely resolved to move the church building to the new location. In the meantime fears were raised that the present church, even after being moved and remodeled would quickly become too small for the growing congregation. The members decided it would be more feasible to erect an entirely new church and so a pledge committee was organized to solicit funds. On September 10, 1923, this committee reported that it had*

*secured \$800.00 in pledges, which aroused such enthusiasm among the members that many new plans to raise money were formulated. The next step in the building project came with a resolution to build a new church, which would seat 500, and the election of a building committee on April 7, 1924. The plan stipulated that construction begin in the spring of 1925 and if possible be concluded in one year.*

### ***Construction Begins***

*The ground breaking ceremonies took place on September 20, 1924 and the cornerstone was laid on November 30, 1924. By that time the little mission church had grown tremendously. In the 30 years of her existence the handful of Christians who founded Siloah had grown into a good sized congregation. The total membership was 451 souls, including 125 voting members, 111 families, 335 communicants, and 26 ladies, whose husbands were not members. As planned, the church was finished in one year. The pastor and his family moved into the new parsonage in September. Both the church and the parsonage were dedicated on October 25, 1925.*

### ***Pastor Burkholz***

*Just before the plans for a new church building had reached full speed Siloah received less joyful news from pastor Lieberum. Due to the pressure of his work on his failing health he announced his resignation, effective November 1, 1923. By January of the following year the congregation's new pastor, Rev. P.J.*



***Burkholz, was installed and began his lengthy ministry at Siloah.***

### ***Growth and Change***

***Beginning in 1917, English services were regularly being held at Siloah. Two new bells were added to the church tower in 1931. The practice of men and women communing separately was discontinued in 1937, so that families could come to the Lord's Supper together. That same year, due to a steadily increasing membership, the possibility of enlarging the church was strongly considered. Sunday school classes were being held in the halls, the kitchen, the balcony, and in any other available space. Attendance at the English service was often between 700 and 800, in a church designed for 500. Some of the congestion was relieved in March of 1940 by the introduction of 3 regular services every Sunday morning, two in English and one in German.***

### ***Fiftieth Anniversary***

***In the fall of 1942 initial steps were taken to make arrangements for the observance of the fiftieth anniversary in the spring of 1944. For this occasion the interior of the entire church building was renovated. An anniversary offering was gathered the year before for the purpose of liquidating the balance of the congregation's debt and creating an expansion fund.***

## **Continued Growth and Expansion**

**Beginning in the late 1930's there was some talk of expanding the existing church. Finally in 1949, under the direction of an independent fund raising organization, a volunteer committee of over three hundred members obtained pledges and contributions totaling \$198,000. In order to have land for expansion, the congregation voted to purchase the three houses located north of the church. Two of these homes were relocated on the northeast corner of 21st and Nash, the site that Siloah still owned since the original church stood there at one time.**

**By 1952 Siloah was busting at the seams. The congregation consisted of 2,804 souls with 2,012 communicants, the Sunday School had 56 teachers and 428 pupils. The church was enlarged to provide a seating capacity of 775. The entrance areas were enlarged, meeting rooms and offices were added in a two-story annex, more rooms and an enlarged kitchen were added in the basement, and a new organ was installed in the church. The congregation gave thanks to God for his blessing upon Siloah at the dedication service in January of 1954.**

## **A Second Pastor Called**

**In 1955 the voters decided that Siloah should have a full-time assistant pastor. Robert J. Voss, of Faith Lutheran Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, was called. He was installed in August of 1955. Seven months later tragedy struck the members and friends of Siloah. After thirty-two years of faithful leadership, Pastor Burkholz was called to his eternal home in heaven on February 16, 1956. In July**

*of that same year, Pastor Luther M. Voss, Robert Voss' father, became Siloah's second assistant pastor.*

### *Grade School Opens Once Again*

*Although the original school had been closed in 1919 there were always a few members who hoped to see it reopened. For some time the congregation had been paying tuition for its children at neighboring Lutheran schools. In June of 1959 some consideration was given to the purchase of a school located near Siloah. The first steps were taken toward once again running a school at Siloah with the calling of a teacher to serve on the faculty of Bethesda Lutheran School. This made it possible for Siloah's children to attend there without paying tuition. Finally, in September of 1961, the decision was made to erect a four-room school adjoining the north end of the church. In September of 1962 the school was opened with an enrollment of 111 pupils.*

### *A Change in Pastors*

*In February, 1963, at the request of the Synod's Spiritual Welfare Commission, the congregation gave Pastor Luther Voss an extended leave of absence to survey military installations that might be served by a full-time camp pastor. During June of 1963, Pastor Robert Voss accepted a call to become president of the new Milwaukee Lutheran Teacher's College. Fortunately, he continued to serve the needs of Siloah until his father returned from his Synod*

*assignment in October, 1963. Two months later the Lord directed Paul E. Eickmann to accept the congregation's call to be senior pastor.*

*After only two years Siloah was again in need of pastors. On December 16, 1965 Luther Voss left for Vietnam after accepting the urgent call to minister to our Wisconsin Synod servicemen. A week after Pastor Voss's departure, Pastor Eickmann was called by the board of Northwestern College to teach Hebrew. He was granted a release effective January 15, 1966. Professor Robert Voss, now serving at the new teacher's college was asked to serve as Siloah's vacancy pastor.*

*In July of 1966, Siloah's prayers were answered when Pastor Wilmer G. Hoffman, then serving at Madison, Wisconsin, accepted the call to serve as senior pastor. In June, 1967 the Lord again answered Siloah's prayers by supplying the congregation with an assistant pastor. Pastor Rolfe. F. Westendorf accepted the call and began his service at Siloah which he continues to this day.*

#### *The Seventy-Five Anniversary*

*Early in 1969 Siloah congregation began to make plans for the celebration of 75 years of God's continued grace and blessing. For this special occasion the church interior was redecorated and the entrance was painted. On May 25, 1969 1,198 friends and members gathered to observe the seventy-fifth anniversary. Over 700 participants enjoyed a noon meal at the church and gathered for a special service in the afternoon.*

## **German Services Discontinued**

***One of the reminders of Siloah's roots came to an end in December of 1970. After polling those who attended the German services it was decided that the services were no longer needed and would therefore be discontinued. This marked the conclusion of 76 years of the Gospel being proclaimed in the German language at Siloah.***

## **A Time of Change**

***In the late 1960's and early 1970's the demographic and racial makeup of the neighborhood surrounding Siloah began to change. In a special booklet prepared for the seventy-fifth anniversary, Pastor Westendorf reflected on the effects that the changes taking place around Siloah would have on the congregation. In regard to the future of Siloah he said,***

***We are confident that Siloah will live. God's continuing grace over the last seventy-five years has made us confident. And we expect that his continuing grace will also make us faithful and zealous in searching out and finding his "other sheep," to the glory of his name and the growth of his church. If the world lasts another twenty-five years, people will read what we have written here in 1969. Will they smile at our childish optimism, or will they respect our confident faith? To a large extent, that depends on what we do right now with the opportunities and blessings that God has given us.***

***Obviously Pastor Westendorf could see that the changing neighborhood presented many new opportunities for evangelism as Siloah reached out to the Lord's "other sheep". If Siloah was to survive a conscious effort would have to be made to reach out to the African-American people who were moving into the neighborhood.***

## **Cross Cultural Evangelism**

*In May of 1970, after expressing concern over the lack of Black pastors, the Wisconsin Synod approved Siloah's request for funding to call a Black lay evangelist. James Parker, who became a member of the congregation in 1967, was chosen for this position. He worked 10 hours per week, following up on prospects and making evangelism calls. Another tool for reaching out to the changing community was Vacation Bible School. In 1971, sixty out of the 113 people who were baptized at Siloah were a result of V.B.S. The following year, enrollment at V.B.S. topped 300 and revealed 91 prospective members. Siloah was making a strong effort to reach out to her new neighbors.*

## **Siloah's Black History**

*At a recent Black History service, Pastor Westendorf presented the following statistics concerning some of "firsts" for Blacks at Siloah. They are included in this history to illustrate the period of time in which Siloah began changing from a predominately white congregation to a predominately black congregation.*

**FIRST BLACK BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION - March 1, 1964**

**FIRST BLACK YOUTH CONFIRMATION - March 19, 1967**

**FIRST BLACK GRADUATE - June, 1968**

**FIRST BLACK FUNERAL - April 6, 1970**

**FIRST BLACK MARRIAGE - June 29, 1973**

**FIRST ALL-BLACK GRADUATION CLASS - June, 1979**

### ***Request for a Third Pastor***

***As Siloah's membership continued to decline, from 1,485 members in 1969 to 850 members in 1975 it was decided that a third pastor should be called to worked strictly in the area of evangelism. In June of 1975 a request for funding of a third pastor was made to the Wisconsin Synod. Unfortunately this request was turned down. In spite of this fact the congregation considered the possibility of funding a minister of evangelism themselves. In July of 1975, the future planning committee made the recommendation that the congregation call a third pastor. They wrote in the July 1975, issue of the Siloah Lutheran that the congregation might "go broke getting one [a third pastor] or eventually go broke not getting one." The church council approved a special voters meeting called for September 28th. Because of the importance of this decision they asked for every voting member to attend the meeting. Although the voters knew that a third pastor would certainly be a boost for evangelism they realized that it would not be financially possible, so the recommendation was defeated.***

### ***A New Ladies Group***

***On October 6, 1976, for the first time in many years, a new ladies group was started. It was formed to meet the need for a ladies group which met in the evening rather than in the afternoon. There were 15 ladies at the first meeting in which officers were elected and the group adopted the name "Pilgrims".***

### **Pastor Grigsby**

*In the fall of 1976, Pastor Henry Grigsby was called from Zoar Lutheran church, in Detroit Michigan. Since pastor Grigsby had planned to retire that year he was extended a limited call to work at Siloah as his health and energy permitted. In exchange for his service he was given the use of the parsonage connected to the church for as long he desired to use it. In January, 1977, Pastor Grigsby accepted the call and was installed on March 6th. He and his wife have been a tremendous blessing to Siloah and continue to live in the parsonage.*

### **Shut-in Service**

*To better meet the spiritual needs of those members who were unable to attend the regular worship services, Siloah began holding shut-in services in 1977. The first service was held on September 28th, with between 30-40 people in attendance. A fellowship meal was served in the upper level of the church. This service continues to be a blessing to Siloah's shut-ins.*

### **Pastor Hoffman Accepts Call**

*After sixteen years of service Pastor Hoffmann accepted a call to Beautiful Savior, Summerville, S.C. in May 1982. He preached his last sermon at Siloah on July 4th, 1982. The congregation gathered for a pot-luck dinner to say goodbye to pastor Hoffman and his family and to wish him well in his new position. Only a few months passed before the Lord answered Siloah's prayers for a new pastor. In*



*September, 1982, Jim Aderman accepted the call to serve at Siloah and was installed on October 10th at 3pm.*

### *The Gospel Choir*

*Over the many years of Siloah's history there have been a number of different choirs that sang God's praise in the worship services. A new choir was added when the desire to have a choir that reflected the cultural heritage of the black members was brought to the attention of the pastors. Mrs. Debra Gilbert volunteered to serve as the first director for the Gospel Choir. On February 23, 1986, 20 enthusiastic members came to the first practice. In February of the following year the Gospel Choir hosted the first annual Black History Sunday. The fact that this new choir could also serve as an evangelism tool was noted when 150 guests attended the special service. In addition to the worship service, the choir also served an ethnic dinner and put on a program of African-American history. This annual celebration of Black history continues to have a positive influence on the congregation and the community.*

### *Pastor Tullberg*

*After four years of faithful service Pastor Jim Aderman accepted a call to Fairview Lutheran Church. After a vacancy of six months the Holy Spirit lead <sup>ed</sup> Pastor Keith Tullberg, who was serving in Eitzen, Minnesota, to accept the call to serve as associate pastor. He was installed on April 17th, 1988, and continues to*

*serve as associate pastor at Siloah*

### *Siloah Today*

*Like most churches, Siloah's 100 years of history are marked by victories and defeats, by growth and decline, by poverty and prosperity, and at many times by an uncertain future. However, one thing has always remained the same. The Gospel has been preached, God's children have been nurtured, and the congregation has remained committed to "Declaring the everlasting Gospel to an everchanging world."*

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