

REV. ALBERT F. SIEGLER:
A MAN COMMITTED
TO THE MINISTRY

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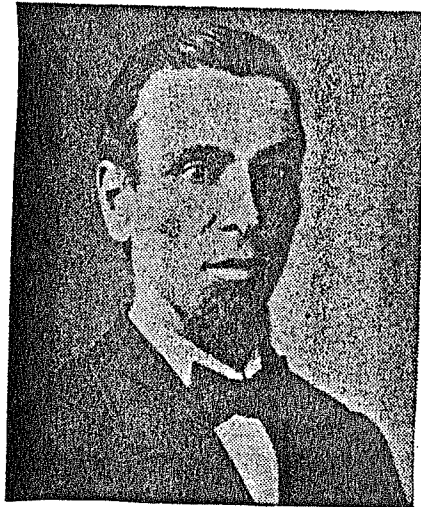
Senior Church History

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Rev. Albert Ferdinand Siegler

(1844-1928)

REVEREND ALBERT F. SIEGLER:
A MAN COMMITTED TO THE MINISTRY

Rev. Albert Ferdinand Siegler is known today as one of the first two students to enroll at the seminary of the Wisconsin Synod in 1863. He is known to me, the author of this biography, as my great, great, grandfather, who enrolled at the seminary exactly 100 years before my birth (1963). In fact, he was born on March 19th, the very day I was born. It was because of these facts and coincidences that my interest grew in finding out more about my forefather and a pioneer of the Wisconsin Synod. As I researched his life history, one thing continued to stand out about him. He was a man committed to the ministry -- to the Synod, but, foremost, to the work of the Lord.

Rev. A. F. Siegler was born on March 19, 1844, to Carl Ludwig and Wilhelmina Siegler. He was baptized in Stojentin, Kreis (county) Stolst, Pommern (Pommerania, Prussia). Not much is known about his life in Pommern. He did attend the University of Stettin, before the family migrated to America. There he had received a teacher's training at the hands of Lehrer Topell in Charbrow. He even served "as an assistant teacher from November 1862 till April 1863 in the parish of Pastor Lohmann at Glowitz (John Philipp Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, p.119).

Albert was the eldest son of seven children -- five boys and two girls. His father, Carl, was a "Boetcher," a copper or barrel maker (taken from Old Church Records in Germany). Three

of Albert's brothers also became barrel makers. One brother, Richard Heinrich, became a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod in 1884. He was well known as a "collector" for the Synod in the early 1900's. He solicited thousands of dollars from the congregations to support the work of Synod and its school.

In the beginning of May 1863, Albert moved with his family to America. Carl and Wilhelmina had six children when they boarded the ship to America. The youngest one at the time was Franz August, who was less than a year old. It is not known why Carl and Wilhelmina decided to take such a great endeavor. But the situation in Prussia was not stable. There was religious persecution, as the Prussian king was trying to unite the Lutherans and Reformed into one state church. Perhaps, the Sieglers left for religious reasons. They landed in Castle Garden, New York, on St. John's Day, and settled in Watertown, WI (Albert's Diary). They became members at St. Mark's Ev. Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI. In fact, the Siegler family cemetery plot is found in God's Acre, a cemetery right outside of Watertown.

WATERTOWN, WI (1863-1868)

In early November 1863, the same year the Sieglers arrived to America, Albert enrolled as one of the first two students at the new seminary of the Wisconsin Synod in Watertown. The other student, Engelhardt, was dropped from enrollment by Professor Moldehnke in late October. School was held in the home of

Moldehnke, which still stands at 814 North 4th Street. The student(s) were housed at St. Mark's parsonage, while President Bading, pastor of St. Mark's, was soliciting money in Europe for the support of the new school. Life at the new seminary was not an easy one. There was a number of subjects that needed to be covered in order to prepare the student(s) for the pastoral ministry. Edwin E. Kowalke, author of Centennial Story, described the typical week in this way,

The day's work began at eight o'clock in the winter, a half-hour earlier in summer, and continued with a short intermission till twelve noon. In the afternoon, again with a short intermission, the work went on till six o'clock in the winter and five-thirty in the summer. Hours like that were obviously needed if the subject matter assigned for treatment was to be covered even with greatest brevity. For example, the schedule for Monday morning included dogmatics, church history, exegesis of the Old Testament, German, mathematics, and Latin. The afternoon schedule was equally formidable: Greek New Testament, the Symbolical Books, Greek grammar, English, Hebrew, exegesis of the Old Testament, history, geography. According to the schedule submitted, this continued through the week until Friday afternoon, when only Greek and geometry were scheduled. But the slack was taken up a eight-thirty on Friday evenings by ex tempore speeches. On Saturdays and during free time the students would be required to do the necessary work about the building or to make trips into the country to collect foodstuffs from farmers (pp.26,27).

By 1865 land was bought and a new school building was erected at the corner of Western and College Avenues. On September 14, 1865, Northwestern College was ready to receive Professor Moldehnke and his seminary students, who now totaled eight. Life went on as normal. The students were still required to help with the upkeep of the building and grounds, which

included working in the garden. But problems arose from a lack of discipline from Professor Moldehnke. During that school year A. F. Siegler left the seminary "as a direct consequence of the disorder in the dormitory" (Kowalke, p.49). He felt that he had been unfairly treated, so he continued his pastoral education at the Missouri seminary in St. Louis, MO. The Northwestern College board met and seemed to agree that Albert was mistreat. They urged him to return, but he refused. Nevertheless, before the next school year (1866-67) he wrote a letter of apology to the board and was welcomed back (p.49).

Albert completed his seminary training in 1866. He was not the first to graduate. That honor belongs to Herman Hoffmann, who already had a few years of theological training in Berlin, Germany (Koehler, p.120). It was in 1865 that he was ordained as the first graduate of the Synod and received his first assignment at a congregation in Portage, WI (p.120). Albert was ordained on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, 1868, by Professor Adolf Hoenecke assisted by Dr. Neumann. The ordination took place at St. Mark's Hall in Watertown.

In addition, it was in that very same hall that Albert entered the holy estate of matrimony with Bertha Wilhelmina Hoge on June 4, 1869. Professor Hoenecke officiated. Their wedding text was John 2:1-11 -- the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine (Albert's Diary). The Lord blessed their marriage with ten children -- six boys and four girls. Three of them died in infancy. Two of them entered the pastoral ministry.

Two of them married pastors.

IRON CREEK, WI (1868-1870)

Rev. Albert F. Siegler's first assignment was to St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church of Iron Creek, WI. This congregation and surrounding "preaching stations" were started by Dr. Moldehnke in 1863. Dr. Moldehnke had come from Watertown as a traveling missionary to minister to them with the means of grace. In that very same year preparations were made to erect a church and parsonage at Iron Creek.

Rev. Siegler was installed at Christmas as the third resident pastor the congregation had had. In his diary, Rev. Albert refers to this congregation as being in Two Creeks, Dunn County. It is not certain what he meant. But according to the 75th anniversary booklet of St. Paul's of Menomonie, WI, which was a preaching station at the time, it is mentioned that the Lutherans of Iron Creek and Beyer Settlement organized into St. John's of Iron Creek (p.6). Perhaps, these two places are the Two Creeks of Dunn County.

Rev. Albert's ministry at Iron Creek was a busy one, yet a fruitful one. He has been described as a "faithful pioneer missionary" (Golden Jubilee at Beyer Settlement, p.16). While he served the Lutherans at St. John's of Iron Creek, he also served at the preaching stations of Menomonie, Downsville, Eau Galle, and Prairie Farm. Because these places were some distance away

from each other, and since the main transportation was horse and buggy, Rev. Siegler would be gone for days, just trying to reach one congregation and hold services. For the Golden Jubilee of the Prairie Farm Congregation, Rev. Siegler describes his first trip there and what life was like as a missionary,

My first trip to Prairie Farm will ever be vivid in my memory. It was in the summer of 1869, when I was requested to also serve the Lutherans in Prairie Farm. The trip was made on horseback. After riding for 30 miles, I came to a river, which was spanned by a bridge. On this day the river had left its original course and had torn another on the opposite side of the bridge. What was to be done? Should I return? This was impossible, since I knew how anxiously the people waited to hear a sermon. In God's name I set the spurs and the horse plunged into the water. As soon as the solid footing was gone, the horse with his rider was swept down the rapid stream. But the guiding hand of God was with me, and led me safe to land. Have forgotten the name of the brother who took care of me, but at his home a goodly number of worshippers gathered the next morning to whom I preached a sermon. After dinner I granted their request and again preached to them (Golden Jubilee at Beyer Settlement, p.16,17).

RIDGEVILLE, WI (1870-1877)

In the spring of 1870, Rev. Siegler received a call to St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Ridgeville, WI. Following the recommendation of President Bading of the Wisconsin Synod, he accepted the call and arrived there safely on May 11th (Albert's Diary). He preached his first sermon on the Wednesday after the Second Sunday after Easter. His text was taken from the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, John 10:12-16. He was installed a month later on Pentecost Sunday by Rev. C. G. Reim of La Crosse, WI

("History of the Monroe County Churches", p.545).

The Ridgeville area, also known as Indian Creek, was very poor. It is said that the settlers were "almost deprived of the very necessities of life" (Centennial booklet of St. John's, Ridgeville). But they did know the importance of worshipping together as a Christian congregation. In June, 1863 a log church was built. The ministry in Ridgeville was successful, until the congregation had to dismiss their new pastor, who had served them from 1868 to 1870, on account of his offenses. Members had lost confidence in the pastoral ministry.

However, confidence was restored when Rev. Albert Siegler "served the Ridgeville Church faithfully and conscientiously for six years" (Rev. C. E. Berg, "History of St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church," p.8). The congregation grew dramatically. By 1872 about 70 families had become members of St. John's (p.8). On November, 1872, it was decided to build a new church, because they had out grown the old log church. The old building was converted into a school house.

During the construction of the new church building, a dissention arose within the congregation. A number of members had belonged to the Reformed Church in Germany. They objected to the interior of the new church, which they claimed reeked with Roman Catholicism. They wanted the sacristy and altar removed (p.9). When Rev. Siegler and the majority of the congregation would not listen to them, the dissenters left the church and formed their own congregation according to their liking. But

this was short-lived. They soon returned and were received back into membership.

When the new church was finally finished, another controversy arose. This was pretty much by the same dissenters as before. They questioned the order of service and wondered if it was too much like the Roman mass. They were questioning if the confession of sins and absolution had to be in every worship service (p.9). It is said that "Pastor Siegler dealt with the troubled souls in the spirit of love and meekness" (p.9). He pointed out the differences between the Roman mass and the Lutheran liturgy. Professor A. F. Ernst of Northwestern College even came and personally assured the members of Rev. Siegler's stand in "adhering firmly to the order of service as contained in the Lutheran Agenda" (p.9). There was once again peace within the congregation. Rev. Albert pointed out in his diary that these problems were solved with "God's gracious help."

Besides his work and difficulties at St. John's, Rev. Siegler was active in gathering together the surrounding Lutherans and establishing a number of churches and preaching stations. Supposedly, St. John's of Ridgeville was the mother church of eight congregations during this time. According to the "History of the Monroe County Churches," Rev. Siegler was active in establishing 14 congregations and preaching stations during his six year ministry (p.545). He played a part in starting such churches as St. Paul's of Tomah, St. John's of Sparta, and St. Jacob's of Norwalk (pp.547-558), all of which are still in

existence today. He was devoted in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the country side.

IXONIA, WI (1877-1881)

Early in 1878 Rev. Siegler received a call from St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in Ixonia, WI. On the encouragement and advice of the president of the Synod and fellow colleagues, he accepted the call and was installed as their pastor and teacher on September 2nd, the 14th Sunday after Trinity. He was installed by Professor Ernst of Northwestern College (Albert's Diary).

His ministry in Ixonia was also busy and fruitful. During his pastorate, Mr. August Jaeger donated one-half acre of land on the condition that a new school be built on that property. The school was built in 1881 (125th Anniversary booklet of St. Paul's of Ixonia, WI). Also during this time, St. Matthew's of Lebanon, and St. John's of Ixonia asked if they could be served by Rev. Siegler. St. Paul's granted this requested and Rev. Siegler's ministry grew to three pastorates. It is interesting to read in the Centennial booklet of St. Paul's about how much he was paid each year. His salary from St. John's was a \$130.00, while St. Paul's and St. Matthew's gave him \$460.00, plus firewood to heat his home.

According to the church records of St. John's of Ixonia, that congregation gives the honor of their existence to the

"leadership and guidance of Pastor A. Siegler" (75th Anniversary booklet of St. John's of Ixonia). The congregation was organized in 1878, with the construction of a church building. Services were held every Sunday. Rev. Siegler would conduct services every two weeks, since he had to serve two other congregations. The other Sundays the elders of the congregation would hold "reading-services" (75th Anniversary of St. John's). Not much is known about these "reading-services." Perhaps, the elders read a portion of the Holy Scriptures or, possibly, they read a sermon, which Rev. Siegler would prepare ahead of time.

Even though his ministry was a busy one, he described in his diary how much he loved that ministry in Ixonia. He wrote, "In this congregation (St. Paul's) we experienced great love and kindness. Brother Fried. Huebner was my true friend and supporter." Then, when he received the call from Columbus, WI, he wrote, "Since my congregation was very attached to me, I found it very difficult to make the change." But in 1881 his ministry in Ixonia came to an end. The Lord guided him to move his family to Columbus, WI.

COLUMBUS, WI (1881-1884)

Because of the earnest advice of Rev. Adelberg, who was speaking for the president of the Synod, and Professor A. Hoenecke, he accepted the call from Zion Ev. Lutheran Church in Columbus, WI (Albert's Diary). He was installed by Professor Ernst on September 4, 1881, the 12th Sunday after Trinity.

During his three year ministry in Columbus, the membership at Zion continued to grow. Nevertheless, his ministry was touched with "inner tension and dissension resulting from the Predestinarian Controversy" (Centennial booklet of Zion's of Columbus). In the 1880's a controversy arose within the Synodical Conference, in which the Wisconsin Synod held membership. The controversy dealt with the doctrine of predestination, or election through grace. The controversy ended with the Synodical Conference holding on to the Scriptural doctrine of election, as taught in the Lutheran Confessions, and with the Ohio Synod withdrawing from the Synodical Conference.

The affects of this controversy came to Columbus, WI, when pastors from the Ohio Synod tried to start an opposition congregation. They failed in their attempts, but they did succeed in stirring up the controversy within the congregation. Rev. Siegler had to take the congregation through a study of the doctrine of election on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. According to the Centennial booklet of Zion Lutheran Church, the congregation as a whole was strengthened by this study. They resolved in 1884 "to remain with the Wisconsin Synod in faithful adherence to the doctrine of predestination at it is taught in Article XI of the Formula of Concord."

LEWISTON, MN (1884-1888)

In the fall of 1884, Rev. Albert Siegler received a call from St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Lewiston, Minnesota. He accepted the call and once again he was moving his family. This time it was out of state. The sad fact is there is no record of his ministry in Lewiston. The church records of St. John's only mention him as their pastor from 1884 to 1888, but nothing significant about him. In fact, there are no records of several of their pastors, following Rev. Siegler. It is not known how they were lost. The only reference of his ministry at St. John's comes from his diary, where he writes, "In the fall of 1884 I received and accepted the call to St. John's congregation in Lewiston, MN, where I was sick almost the entire time."

TWO RIVERS, WI (1888-1892)

In the fall of 1888, he accepted the call to St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Two Rivers, WI. He was installed on the 1st Sunday in Advent by Rev. P. R. Pieper (Albert's Diary). After that day there was much to do.

The year before he came, the former pastor, Rev. J. P. Koehler, began an enormous church building project, before he accepted the call as professor of Northwestern College. Rev. Siegler had to see the new church to completion, which still stands today as one of the highest standing structures in Two Rivers. According to the Centennial booklet of St. John's, Rev. A. F. Siegler is described as a capable shepherd, "who took hold

of the project with a firm hand." The old church was converted into a school, which flourished with the growth of the church.

Rev. Albert Siegler's ministry in Two Rivers was definitely exciting, and certainly busy. The only other thing that he mentions about his stay in Two Rivers is the damp air. He wrote in his diary, "The damp lake air was not easy on my health." It is not known in what condition his health was, or what specifically was wrong with him. Conceivably, it could be the same health problems he had in Lewiston, MN.

NORFOLK, NE (1892-1899)

In 1892, Rev. A. Siegler would again move his family out of the state of Wisconsin. He accepted the call to St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in Norfolk, Nebraska. He was installed on Ascension Day by Pastor P. H. Brandt of Stanton, NE. There is not much recorded concerning his ministry in Nebraska. The Centennial booklet of St. Paul's describes the day Rev. Siegler was installed as "a very happy day at St. Paul's" (p.9). Certainly, he was faithful with his work at Norfolk, NE.

One sad thing did happen at Norfolk. His wife, Bertha, died in 1899, the same year he took the call to Wauwatosa, WI. The youngest living child, Lydia Augusta, was 18 years old at the time. How Bertha died has been difficult to determine. The family history of the Sieglers say that she died in a stove explosion. But Rev. Siegler writes in his diary that she died of

heart failure (Herzlaehmung). Perhaps, it was the explosion that killed her, but the coroner recorded it as a heart attack. This, of course, is only a guess. Nonetheless, it is never easy to lose one's spouse. The Lord had blessed their marriage with 30 years together.

WAUWATOSA, WI (1899-1904)

Before the turn of the century, Rev. Siegler returned to Wisconsin and accepted the call to Peace (Friedens) Ev. Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa. Professor A. Hoenecke installed him on the 20th Sunday after Trinity (Albert's Diary). Concerning his ministry at Peace, Rev. Albert wrote in his diary, "With God's help I was successful in reuniting the two congregations in Wauwatosa." Besides this information, there are no records about his ministry in Wauwatosa. In fact, there are no records for Peace Lutheran Church. Since much of the Wauwatosa area has been swallowed up by Milwaukee, it is impossible to determine the location of the church, or if the church still exists today, perhaps, under a different name.

However, his ministry in Wauwatosa was certainly a fruitful one, since he was successful in bringing two congregations together. In addition, during this time the faculty of Northwestern College would advise students to go and hear him preach (Biography of Rev. Albert F. Siegler by Rev. Reginald Siegler). In his sermon on the feeding of the 5,000, he was

quoted in saying, "Those loaves weren't Milwaukee rye bread (arms stretched wide to indicate huge loaves). Those were little semmel (thumbs held to middle finger). The fish were not whales (arms stretched wide). They were little minnies (fingers about three inches apart). He was the reverse fisherman" (Quote by the former Pastor Kirst of Beaver Dam, which is found in the biography by Rev. Reginald Siegler).

TOWN OF FOREST, WI (1904-1909)

In 1904 Rev. Albert Siegler accepted his last call before his retirement. He was call to St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Forest, WI, which is today North Fond du lac. He was installed by Rev. P. W. Huth on the 25th Sunday after Trinity (Albert's Diary). Not much is known about his ministry at St. Paul's. He certainly served them faithfully until October, 1909, when at the fall quarterly meeting he resigned from the public ministry. In his diary, Rev. Siegler wrote for his final statement, "I wait for your salvation, O Lord, and I follow your commands (Psalm 119:166)." He had faithfully served the Lord as a shepherd for 41 years.

WONEWOC, WI (1909-1929)

When Rev. Siegler retired from the public ministry, he made his home with his oldest daughter, Mrs. Clara Adeline

Mittelstaedt, at Wonewoc, WI. During those years he was active in assisting in preaching and other ministerial work. He continued to contribute devotional articles for the "Gemeinde-Blatt," an official German publication of the Wisconsin Synod. He loved to sit in his room and smoke his long stem pipe, as he continued to read and study, primarily God's Holy Word.

Those who remembered him, primarily his grandchildren, knew him as Grosspapa, who always preached at least 40 minutes. He was a dynamic preacher, who loved to hit the pulpit, as he preached. He preached only in German. Since there was no sound system in those days, he had to project his voice, in order to reach the back of the church. He seemed to be very concerned about making sure he was loud enough. There was a humorous story he used to tell about being loud enough. He and his wife had an agreement between each other that every time she fanned herself he was suppose to preach louder. One day it was very warm in church and Bertha forgot about their arrangement. She began to fan herself and he began to get louder. In fact, the faster she fanned, the louder he got (Interview with Margaret Albrecht).

He loved to play the piano and teach his grandchildren those old German nursery rhymes. He also loved to sit down with his grandchildren and tell them fairy tales. Rev. Reginald Siegler, a grandson of Rev. Albert, recorded this fairy tale in a biography of his grandfather,

"We especially loved the one about the cow, the donkey, a pig, a dog, a cat and a rooster, all so old that their owners had decided they were no longer useful and

were to be butchered. They all ran away, somehow got together and found a house in the forest. The house was occupied by robbers, so the animals decided to scare the robbers out of the house. At midnight they all started to bray, oink, bark, moo, meow and crow. The robbers ran off into the woods and the house in the forest became the refuge of the aged animals and they 'lived happily ever after.' The high point of the story was the imitation of the animals. The one I enjoyed especially was the 'kickereecoo' of the rooster."

One thing he loved as a snack was "klabber." This was milk that was left out to sour and thicken. He would usually put sugar or cinnamon on it. One thing he didn't like was the problems he had with his feet. He had to wear soft felt shoes, because he had corns and bunions on his feet. Finally, like all grandpas he wore false teeth and loved to take them out for his grandchildren (Biography by Rev. Reginald Siegler).

On May 6, 1928, Rev. Albert F. Siegler died at his daughter's home at Wonewoc, WI. He died at the age of 84 years. Funeral services were held at Wonewoc. Rev. Zarembo held a service at the parsonage. At the church Rev. J. Glaeser preached the German sermon, while Rev. Popp had the English one. On May 9th, his remains were committed to the ground at God's Acre cemetery, Watertown, WI, with Rev. Klingmann officiating. He was survived by three sons, three daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, eighteen grandchildren, one great grandchild, two brothers and one sister (NWL, 1928, p.184). There is no doubt that he is with his Savior in heaven.

He will always be remembered by his church as a committed man, who would be called under the guidance of the Synod to help

churches with serious problems. The Northwestern Lutheran sums up the life of Rev. Albert F. Siegler with these words,

Another pioneer of the original Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin has passed away. Pastor Albert F. Siegler, who died on the 6th of May, 1928, at the age of 84 years, has been affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod almost from its beginning. Passing through its pioneer days he had taken an active part in the shaping of the Synod both as to its expansion and the establishing of its doctrinal standard. A studious searcher of Scriptures and a staunch adherent of the teachings of the Lutheran Church, Rev. Siegler, together with other contemporary Synodical pioneers, had aided in no mean measure in the upbuilding of our Synod in doctrine and practice. The older members of the Synod will still recollect his theses on the authority and use of the Word of God, he presented at the synodical meetings in 1883 and 1884, a treatise which still may be read with profit (NWL, 1928, p. 184).

As one reviews the life of Rev. Albert F. Siegler, there is no doubt he is a man committed to the ministry -- to the Synod, but, foremost, to the Lord.

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Two Rivers, WI (1888-1892)

Centennial booklet of St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Two Rivers, WI.

Norfolk, NE (1892-1899)

Centennial booklet of St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in Norfolk, NE.

Town of Forest (1904-1909)

Centennial booklet of St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in North Fond du lac, WI.

NOTE: All the anniversary booklets of the different churches are found in the Synod Archives at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI.