

A History of  
Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Saginaw, MI  
From 1980 to 2000 AD



Senior Church History Paper  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
Prof. James Korthals  
April 23, 2001

By Michael G. Sheppard

When one looks at the past one hundred years, one sees many changes. But what does one see when looking at a congregation that is about to celebrate a hundred years of service to the Lord? Many changes have taken place in the last hundred years in the Wisconsin Synod. For example, in the last hundred years, the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod has become an English speaking church body. It has seen the advent of the New International Version of the Bible, a change from the King James Version. WELS has adopted two new hymnals during that time. The list is perhaps too long to be recounted here.

What changes have occurred in specific congregations of the WELS? In particular, how has change effected Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saginaw, MI?<sup>1</sup> In the ninety-seven years since it's founding on July 26, 1903, Christ Lutheran has also seen changes. There have been periods of growth and periods of membership losses. Some of this is due to the economy of the area and some is due to disagreements within the congregation. Despite these events in the life of the congregation, the congregation continues to carry out the work that God has set before his Church. One needs go no further than the Sunday bulletin<sup>2</sup> to see the commitment of the congregation in its efforts of proclaiming the good news about Christ to the world.

This paper only proposes to cover the years of the congregation's history from 1980 to 2000 AD. The first seventy-seven years of Christ Lutheran' history is the subject of another paper.<sup>3</sup> The congregation also has preserved this history in anniversary booklets and a running history of the congregation.<sup>4</sup> However, some events that are recorded in the running history that

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<sup>1</sup> Some would also say that Christ Lutheran is in Shields, MI.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix I

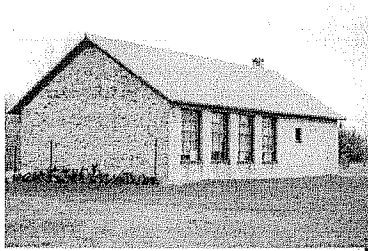
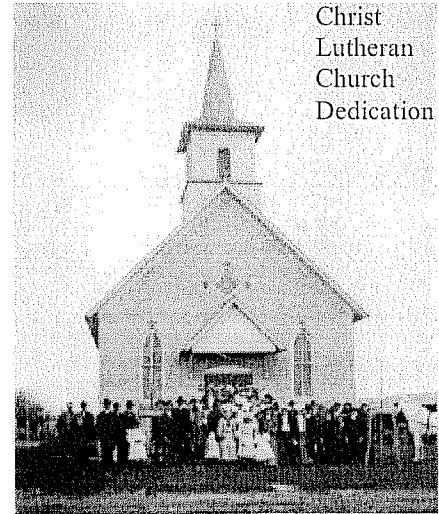
<sup>3</sup> Victor L. Headrick, Senior Church History Paper, *A Brief History of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Shields, MI*, April 30, 1980

<sup>4</sup> The Fiftieth and Seventy-Fifth Anniversaries are commemorated in booklet form. The running history of the congregation is incomplete. Events only can be found until the mid-1970's. Work is in progress to place the running history on computer and to update to the present time.

occurred before 1980 need mentioning in order to explain some of the events that occurred in the eighties and nineties.

### Before 1980 AD

After the congregation's founding in 1903, the congregation began to grow and its facilities were expanded. The congregation built a church, a school building, and a parsonage on the church property. The various building projects were funded with loans, which the congregation paid back.<sup>5</sup> The congregation had a set back in its growth in 1930 when the congregation defeated the motion to step out of the Wisconsin Synod and join the Ohio Synod. On March 16, 1930, the voters met with Rev. Miller of Saginaw, a representative from the Ohio Synod, and officers of the Ohio Synod. The motion to join the Ohio Synod was defeated.<sup>6</sup> This caused many of the



The Old School  
(once a two-room school)

members to leave Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church during 1930 and membership dropped from 206 baptized members to 129 during that year.

Despite this challenge that faced the congregation in its early years, the congregation continued to grow as the community continued to grow. The congregation in 1967 built

<sup>5</sup> The Voters resolved that each member would give a certain amount in order to pay off the debt incurred during construction. These motions were made at various voters' meetings in the early years of the congregation and passed. They may be found in the running history of the congregation.

<sup>6</sup> On January 17, 1930, the congregation resolved to leave Wisconsin Synod and seek entrance into the Ohio Synod. The vote was taken on January 26, 1930. Fourteen voted to stay in the Wisconsin Synod and seventeen voted to join Ohio. At the March 16h, 1930 meeting, the voters voted on the issue. Twenty voted for staying in the Wisconsin Synod and eighteen for joining the Ohio Synod.

its new church building. But before the loan had been repaid, the local government required the congregation to close the old school. The congregation took a special offering to pay off the loan. Although there were some in the congregation who did not support the construction of a new building, the congregation borrowed money for the construction of the new school building.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the congregation entered the eighties with a loan that became a financial burden to the congregation.

### 1980-2000 AD

In the eighties, Christ congregation saw some challenges as well as some blessings. The challenges were such that the congregation declined in number of members, the school enrollment decreased until the school was closed for a time. Debt confronted the congregation. How did all of these things happen? What were some of the reasons that they occurred?

The congregation was growing in the late seventies and early eighties. In 1980, the congregation extended a permanent call to Mrs. Virgene Klockziem, who had received a one-year call the previous year. She would teach the third, fourth, and fifth grade.<sup>8</sup> In May of 1980, Victor Headrick graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.<sup>9</sup> The growth of the congregation is evident from a decision by the church council to hold two services every Sunday from September to May.<sup>10</sup> A trial period with two services was held from March to May 1980. In September of that year seventy-five students enrolled in Christ Lutheran Elementary School. The Lutheran Elementary School staff consisted of four teachers in 1981: Mr. Charles Buege,

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<sup>7</sup> "Because of the recession, no banks wanted to lend us the money to build the new school. I remember our lady teacher, Ann Ernest, saying, 'If Peter could walk on water, we can float a loan, if we just keep our eyes on Jesus.'" Pastor Gerald Schroer, Questionnaire, page 1.

<sup>8</sup> Council Minutes January 10, 1980; Recommendation made to the Voter's Assembly

<sup>9</sup> Pastor Gerald Schroer attended the graduation service at WLS in Mequon. At the May 8, 1980 Church Council meeting, the Church Council voted to pay Pastor Schroer's expenses for the trip.

<sup>10</sup> During the summer months there would be one service on Sunday.

Mrs. Virgene Klockziem, Miss Sally Guise, and Mrs. Patricia Walters.<sup>11</sup> From all of these events in the life of the congregation we see the blessings that the Lord poured out on the congregation at that time. The congregation in 1981 numbered 738 souls with 527 communicants. The average Sunday attendance was 301 people. The congregation was even considering requesting a vicar from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the near future<sup>12</sup> or the possibility of calling a second pastor.

Even in the face of congregational growth, the congregation had difficulties meeting its budget. The number of members started to decrease in the following years. There were nineteen less members in 1982 than in 1981. The membership continued to decrease from then on. In 1990 the membership of the congregation consisted of 523 souls. In 2000, the membership was at 380 souls.<sup>13</sup> In order to understand why the membership decreased, one must look at some of the events that occurred in the congregation as well as in the community.

The economy of Shields, MI in 1980 exhibited growth. People were moving into the area but when General Motors started to cut back its operation in the early eighties the economy of Shields stalled. This set back in the community also affected the congregation. The community

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. Buege served as the principal until he accepted a call to St. Paul's Stevensville, MI in March of 1982 and left in July of that year; Mr. Michael Thompson accepted the call to serve as principal and upper grade teacher in March of the same year; Mrs. Bud Klockziem resigned her call in February 1986. During her retirement as an elementary school teacher, she taught piano at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw. After fifteen years at MLS, Mrs. Klockziem has retired from teaching piano; Miss Guise taught first through third grade until she left in the summer of 1987. The Church Council minutes show that she transferred to Ocean Drive Lutheran Church in Pompano Beach, FL; Mrs. Walters was called to help teach Kindergarten.

<sup>12</sup> Church Council minutes, February 10, 1983; Pastor Gerald Schroer stated that at that time there was a need for help in his ministry due to the size of the congregation. February 9, 1984 Church Council Meeting also discussed the possibility of a vicar.

<sup>13</sup> A full listing of membership numbers are listed in Appendix II.

grew at a slow rate in the 1990's. Shields currently has become part of greater Saginaw.<sup>14</sup> The membership in the congregation changed from a young congregation to an old congregation.<sup>15</sup>

In 1981 the congregation had a loan for the building of the new school building. Individual members had made commitments to pay for the loan by giving offerings. However, the members were not fulfilling their commitments to pay for the school building. The church council then decided to write off what was owed from the building fund to the general fund in order to pay for the loan.<sup>16</sup> This put the general fund behind in its payments for operating expenses.

Budgetary problems became evident as the congregation struggled to pay its expenses. The Church Council attempted to solve the problem by making appeals to the congregation to give their offerings so that the bills might be paid.<sup>17</sup> The next month the Church Council discussed the problem regarding the Bell Tower Fund. At that time the congregation had fallen behind its budget by \$9,000.<sup>18</sup> By November of 1988, the congregation had fallen behind the budget by \$18,000.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the nineties, new subdivisions again were planned and built. One such subdivision does not have a house that values below \$300,000 and even contains a house that is reported to be worth two million.

<sup>15</sup> Pastor Herbert Kuske, "In the 60's Christ was a very young congregation with many baptisms and many child and adult confirmations. It was a congregation with a future. In the 90's it is an old congregation with few young families, at least not in church."

<sup>16</sup> Council Minutes, January 10, 1980; a motion was made and passed.

<sup>17</sup> Council Minutes, December 8, 1983; Motion made and passed to make a special appeal to the congregation to "catch-up" on expenses. A letter was to be sent out to explain the current situation to the members.

<sup>18</sup> When the Church Building was completed in May, 1967, no bell tower was included in the design and construction. However, the congregation planned to build a bell tower as a freestanding tower. A bell tower fund was created. By January of 1984 the money in the bell tower fund had been spent to pay for current operating expenses for the congregation. Pastor James Seelow in his questionnaire points out that on two occasions the bell tower fund money was used for operating expenses. This problem was discussed at the January 8, 1984 Church Council meeting.

<sup>19</sup> Church Council Minutes, November 12, 1988.

The financial problems and a growing tension between the school staff and the students' parents<sup>20</sup> continued throughout the 1980's ending the decade in the closing of Christ Lutheran Elementary School. The enrollment for the school for the next year was projected to be eleven with the following year projected at seven students. At the Voters' Meeting on April 23, 1989 the voters approved the motion to close the elementary school.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Michael Thompson served the congregation as principal during the 1980's and after the congregation decided to close the school, Mr. Thompson accepted a call to Grace Lutheran School in Durand, MI. In the fall of 1989, Christ Lutheran sent eight students to St. Johns Lutheran School, Saginaw.<sup>22</sup> This arrangement continued for five years when the school was reopened in the fall of 1993.<sup>23</sup>

Both Pastor Gerald Schroer and Pastor James Seelow met the challenges of the financial situation and drop in attendance with continued efforts to encourage the congregation. Stewardship programs included a variety of activities designed to increase the members' awareness of the problem and their roll as members of the congregation and children of God. These programs included cottage meetings, commitment cards, and Stewardship Sundays.<sup>24</sup> Postcards were sent out to members who had not attended church in some time. The congregation made every effort to solve its problems.

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<sup>20</sup> Mr. Mark Bannan states that the congregation had problems with the staff of the school but the problems did not come to light when they occurred because members left rather than dealing with their problems.

<sup>21</sup> Board for Parish Education Meeting of June 1, 1989: The congregation would explore the possibility of selling excess supplies and school furniture that would no longer be needed.

<sup>22</sup> The St. Johns that is mentioned here refers to the congregation known in the area as St. Johns Brockway. Brockway is the street on which the church and school is situated.

<sup>23</sup> Christ Lutheran School started on Sept. 7, 1993. The cost for reopening the school was estimated to be three to four thousand above tuition costs.

<sup>24</sup> Church Council Minutes, March 10, 1985 - Pastor Seelow requested 18 men to help with presentations. Oct. 22, 1992 - The year's stewardship emphasis would be "90 Years of Faithfulness"

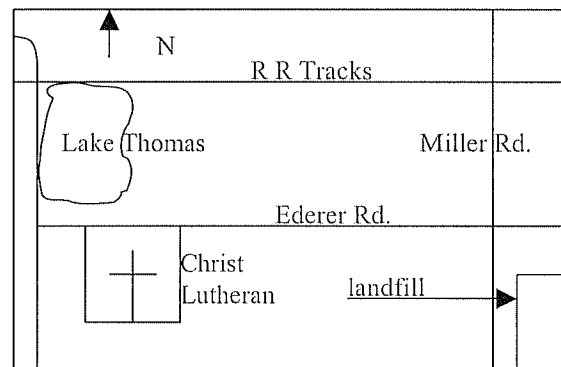
Other challenges confronted the congregation during those years besides the financial situation. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church is

located on Ederer Road. Ederer Road is the dividing line between James Township and Thomas Township. The church sits on the South side of the street and is in James Township. There is an old clay pit across the street that has become

a lake known as Lake Thomas. Sexton Corporation bought Lake Thomas<sup>25</sup> and the clay pit at the corner of Miller Road and Ederer Road for the purpose of using those two sites as landfills. This smelly situation confronted the congregation. The

neighbors and the church watched intently as the

Michigan Department of Natural Resources held hearings on this matter.<sup>26</sup> Since Christ Lutheran was in a different township they could do nothing but watch intently as their neighbors and Thomas Township Council discussed the matter.<sup>27</sup> The matter was decided in favor of Sexton Corp. However, the company could not get the right of way. They were planning to come in off of Miller Road and follow the railroad tracks to Lake Thomas. However, the company did start working at the other site.<sup>28</sup>



Lake Thomas as it is today.

<sup>25</sup> TV 5, WNEM, interviewed Pastor Schroer next to Lake Thomas regarding the landfill.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Bannan also stated that every time the landfill was defeated in hearings, the Sexton Corp. would take the matter to a new court or administrator and the decision would be overturned. Later, Sexton sold out to another firm and had property in Burch Run, MI, which would be a larger landfill.

<sup>27</sup> At that time the school took a field trip to the County Court House to witness the hearings. The congregation also gave the DNR permission to hold meetings in the gymnasium.

<sup>28</sup> The site at Miller Rd. and Ederer Rd. has now been closed for a few months because it is full and can no longer be used as a dumpsite.



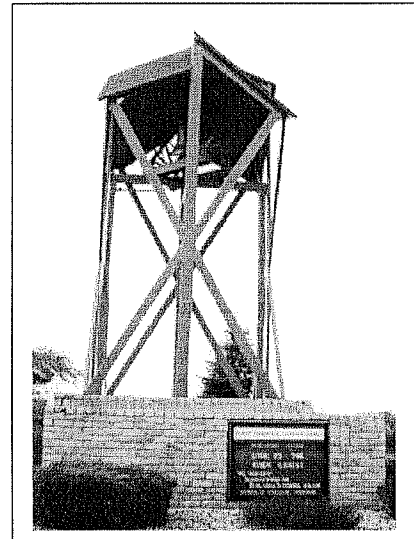
In view of all of these obstacles in the path of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, one may wonder how the congregation survived throughout all of the trials. Of course, we look to a gracious Lord who cares for his Church. This congregation is no exception. The Lord of the Church does marvelous things for his people and ensures that the word continues to be proclaimed to those in spiritual darkness. Christ congregation came out of its burdens with many blessings.

As with everything that the Lord does for His people it was to our benefit. The remainder of the congregation struggled for many years and were taught to understand and apply Biblical principles to our attitudes and giving. We also gained a respect for the work of a LES<sup>29</sup> in the congregation.<sup>30</sup>

Many improvements on the church property were made such as the remodeling of the parsonage, the new bell tower<sup>31</sup>, and the paving of the parking lot.<sup>32</sup> The congregation also in 1997 built a new garage for the parsonage and paved the parsonage driveway.<sup>33</sup>



Parsonage and new garage



Bell Tower

<sup>29</sup> Lutheran Elementary School

<sup>30</sup> Mr. Mark Bannan, Questionnaire.

<sup>31</sup> Construction on the new bell tower was started in May of 1991. The design was taken from the bell tower on the Northwestern College campus in Watertown, WI.

<sup>32</sup> Parish Planning Council, January 28, 1993. Rough bid for paving the parking lot was proposed. (The Church Council had originally contained all of the members of the various boards. Pastor Seelow suggested that the congregation change the Church Council into Parish Planning Council. This occurred at the end of 1990. From then on only the chairmen of each committee attended the meetings. Pastor presented the organization of the Parish Planning Council at the Oct. 20, 1988 meeting of the Church Council. Church Council Minutes, Oct. 20, 1988)

The financial situation of the congregation improved over the years. The congregation has paid off its mortgages for the church and the school buildings. In 1999 and 2000, the congregation met the budget for each year.

The congregation reopened its school to once again provide its children with a Christian education in the fall of 1993.<sup>34</sup> Mrs. James Seelow volunteered to teach at Christ Lutheran School at a reduced salary at first. The congregation opened the school with an enrollment of nine students. Two Kindergarten students attended at St. Johns on Brockway.<sup>35</sup> Judy Barcholtz taught Pre-school.<sup>36</sup> The school has continued to hold classes from that time and enrollment has increased each year. The Home School Society restarted its activities in 1996.<sup>37</sup> The Lutheran Pioneer program had ceased due to lack of leadership and youth to participate in the activities. The possibility of restarting the Lutheran Pioneer program arose at the January 16, 1990 meeting of the Church Council. In the April 1997, Pastor Herbert Kuske returned to Saginaw after he retired from full-time ministry. He now is able to assist Pastor Seelow with the work of the congregation.

Many outreach opportunities presented themselves to Christ Lutheran Church. The school and pre-school provided the congregation with a way to reach out into the community. The congregation conducted phone canvassing<sup>38</sup> and mass media outreach<sup>39</sup> as tools to approach the people of the community. In 1989, the Evangelism Board sent out mailings inviting the

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<sup>33</sup> The old garage was demolished on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997 and the new garage was built at a cost of \$11,000. The parking lot paving cost \$30,000. Parish Planning Council, May 15, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> The projection for the cost of reopening the school in fall of 1993 was three to four thousand above tuition costs. Voters' meeting minutes, May 27, 1993. The school saved \$1600 by reopening the school instead of paying tuition at St. Johns on Brockway.

<sup>35</sup> June 18, 1993 Voters' meeting minutes.

<sup>36</sup> Pre-school was to be a story hour twice a week. June 18, 1993 Voters' meeting minutes.

<sup>37</sup> Parish Planning Meeting Minutes, January 23, 1996

<sup>38</sup> Parish Planning Council Minutes, July 18, 1991. The Go '91 outreach program.

<sup>39</sup> Church Council Minutes, January 16, 1990

people of the community to Easter services<sup>40</sup> and Easter cards were sent to 3,300 homes.<sup>41</sup> The Evangelism Board used Vacation Bible School as an outreach tool. What wonderful blessings God has poured out on Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

### After 2000 AD



Christ Lutheran will celebrate one hundred years in service to Christ in the summer of 2003. Yet the congregation also looks to the future and the ministry before it. Shields, MI is now growing, however slow.

More and more people are moving into the area and building new homes. The potential for this rural congregation to share the gospel with new people continues to grow as the community grows. Therefore the congregation looks to the future with great anticipation.<sup>42</sup>

One potential for growth in ministry is the growing need in the area for early childhood ministry. In the community live families with both parents working. Many of these parents drive past Christ Lutheran Church to go to St. Luke's, a sister WELS congregation.<sup>43</sup> An early childhood ministry is still in the planning stages.<sup>44</sup> The congregation has now extended a call for an upper grade teacher and principal. In the future there is a proposal to build another classroom onto the existing school building. This classroom would be equipped solely for early childhood ministry.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Church Council Minutes, March 13, 1989

<sup>41</sup> Church Council Minutes, January 12, 1989

<sup>42</sup> Pastor Herbert Kuske, "The congregation is blessed with a devotion by people and pastor to faithfulness to the entire Word of God. That faithfulness will be blessed by God in His own way at His own time."

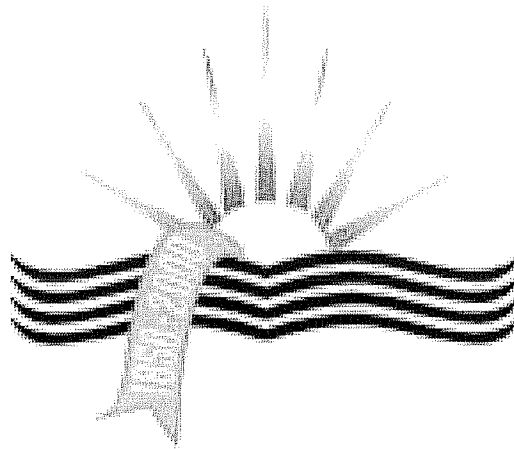
<sup>43</sup> Pastor Seelow stated that St. Luke's is turning people away from its day care and pre-school programs because they cannot handle more children than they already have attending their program. Interview on April 20, 2001 at 10:00 AM.

<sup>44</sup> Mr. Mark Bannan, Questionnaire

<sup>45</sup> This plan includes a pre-school room, complete with its own bathrooms and outside access.

Further opportunity for outreach into the community may occur as new neighborhoods are being constructed. In the April 19, 2001 edition of the *Saginaw News*, there is an article concerning the proposal of placing a new mobile home park down the road from Christ Lutheran Church. The mobile home park would be built at the Northeast corner of Miller Rd. and Ederer Rd. across the street from the landfill. The Planning Commission has approved the mobile home park, which will bring an influx of new people into the community.<sup>46</sup>

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church moves forward in Christ as it proclaims the message of Christ crucified to the members of the congregation and the people of the community. May God continue to keep this congregation through any trials that occur in the future and to bless this congregation as it carries out the Great Commission.



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<sup>46</sup> The park would have 200 units. *Saginaw News*, Thursday, April 19, 2001, "Housing plan gets the OK": This article is printed in Appendix III

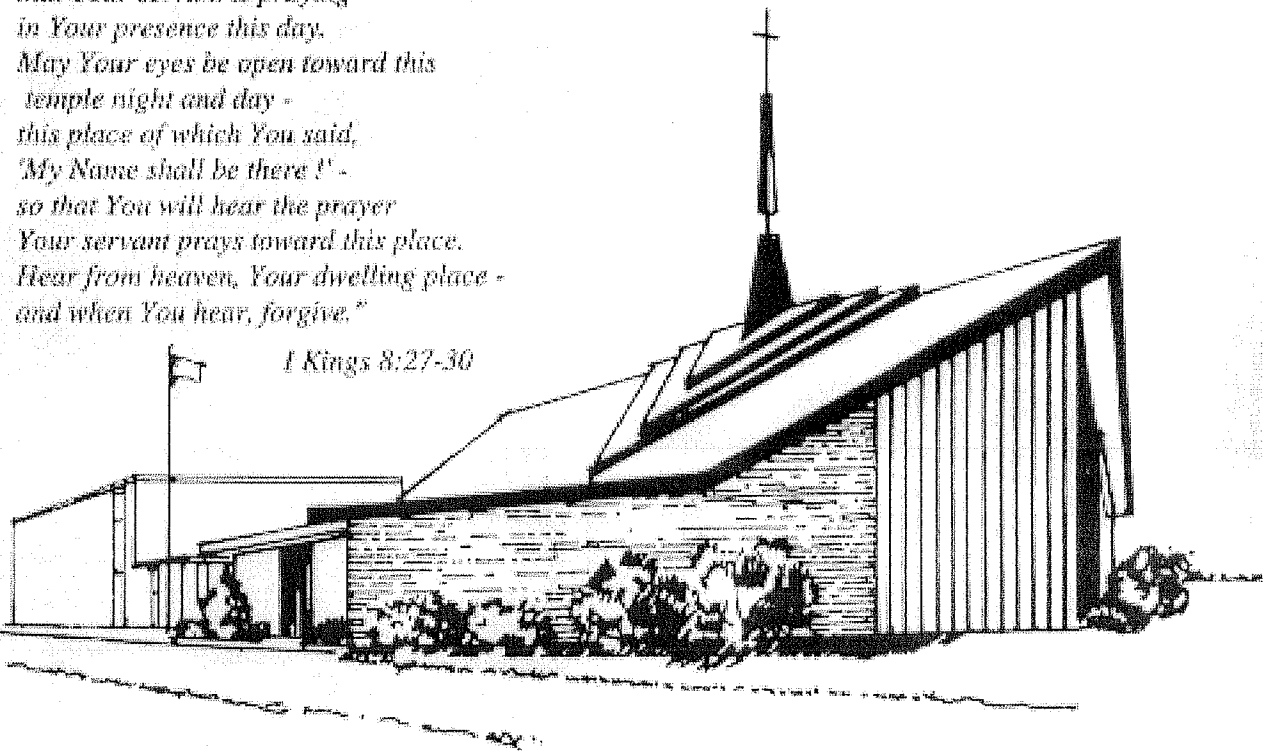
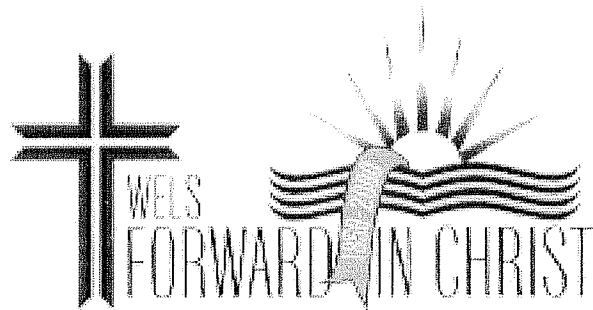
# Appendix I

## **CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL**

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

*"Will God really dwell on earth?  
The heavens, even the highest heaven,  
cannot contain You -  
how much less this temple I have built!  
Yet give attention to Your servant's prayer  
and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God,  
Hear the cry and the prayer  
that Your servant is praying  
in Your presence this day.  
May Your eyes be open toward this  
temple night and day -  
this place of which You said,  
'My Name shall be there!' -  
so that You will hear the prayer  
Your servant prays toward this place.  
Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place -  
and when You hear, forgive."*

*1 Kings 8:27-30*



8795 Ederer Rd.  
Saginaw, (Shields), Michigan  
Phone 781-0980

PASTOR: James P. Seefow  
8765 Ederer Rd.  
Phone 781-2885

**Bulletin Cover**

# Appendix I

## WELCOME TO CHRIST!

If you are a newcomer, we are happy to have you with us! If you have been with us before, we're glad to have you back! May you find peace in the message our service presents: God promises His love and forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

If you are living in our area, we invite you to worship with us regularly, and enjoy the blessings of Christian fellowship. We would be most happy to have you play an active role in our congregation: our Pastor can give you information on church membership.

If you haven't already done so, please sign our guest register, located in the entryway.

## OUR CONGREGATION

Christ Ev. Lutheran Church has served the Shields area for over 90 years with the Gospel message of forgiveness and peace.

We believe that God has brought us together here at Christ to share meaningful worship, instruction in His Word, genuine fellowship, mutual encouragement and opportunities for godly service.

A Lutheran Elementary School education is made available for the children of our members and is supported by the offerings of all the members of Christ.

Our Pastor stands ready to serve you in any way that is consistent with his office as the called minister of Christ congregation. Private Christian counseling, guidance and instruction are available to all who request it.

## OUR PURPOSE

Christ congregation exists so that with the Gospel of Jesus Christ it might strengthen the faith of its members and reach out into the community and the world. To carry out that message we believe and teach:

- that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and the only foundation for faith and life;
- that the Lord God revealed in the Bible, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the true and living God;
- that all people have sinned against His holy will, and therefore deserve to be cut off from Him eternally;
- that Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver all people from the guilt and power of sin by living and dying as the perfect and only Substitute;
- that through faith created by the Holy Spirit the benefits of Christ's work are received personally;
- that on the last day Jesus will return and judge the living and the dead, and will take all those who trust in Him into eternal life.

We join in this confession with over 1100 congregations of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, and with them carry on a world-wide ministry.

## OUR MINISTRY

WORSHIP 9:30 a.m. each Sunday

SUNDAY SCHOOL/BIBLE CLASS 8:15 a.m. each Sunday (Sept.-May)

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY & INSTRUCTION COURSES as scheduled

THE LORD'S SUPPER is celebrated on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month. Visitors are requested to speak to the Pastor before coming to the Sacrament.

Bulletin Back

## Appendix II

### Attendance Charts from 1980-2000

Year	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Ave. Sunday Attendance	301	292	291	275	250	239	214	195	184	158
Disciplined each Year	Figures Are Not Available					16	38	10	10	13
New Members						6	11	6	8	1
Communicants	527	533	546	546	547	532	491	461	438	421
Souls	738	719	733	733	715	693	621	581	584	523

Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Ave. Sunday Attendance	150	144	143	133	132	133	128	134	132	119
Disciplined Each Year	0	26	3	17	0	1	2	0	11	3
New Members	6	4	6	5	3	9	14	4	1	5
Communicants	413	381	371	352	341	342	345	346	316	306
Souls	518	472	455	433	411	415	422	427	392	380

# Appendix III

Saginaw News, Thursday, April 19, 2001, Andy Grimm

# Metro

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2001

## Housing plan gets the OK

*Planners had little choice in approving the mobile home park proposal.*

**ANDY GRIMM**  
■ THE SAGINAW NEWS

Plans for a mobile home park in Thomas Township are moving forward despite opposition from residents.

After hearing more than an hour of questions and complaints Wednesday, members of

the Planning Commission unanimously approved a special use permit that will allow developers to build a 200-unit mobile home park off South Miller near Ederer.

"It seems like it was already decided," said Lori Martin, who lives on Ederer. "You move to the country to live in the country, then you go from 12 people on your road to 200."

Martin and more than 20 others complained that the mobile home park would strain infrastructure, schools and public safety resources.

PLEASE SEE PLANNERS — B2 ▶



# PLANNERS OK of mobile home park a formality

CONTINUED FROM B1

Plans for the 54-acre parcel already have received approval from officials representing schools, police and firefighters, said Dan Sika, community development director.

The property is zoned for residential use, although parts are in a flood plain.

County officials will consider drainage and road changes once Birmingham-based developer Paul Ashley submits engineering documents.

The commission had little choice but to recommend that the Township Board of Trustees approve the proposal, said Chairman Richard Reuter.

"The owners of the property have the right to do whatever they want with it as long as they operate inside the rules and regulations," Reuter said.

"We can't indiscriminately say, 'We don't like what you're doing.' That's the good old boy way."

The Board of Trustees likely will act during its Monday, May 7, meeting, said Timothy Ader, who

sits on both the Planning Commission and the township board.

The state Department of Environmental Quality and Mobile Home Commission must give final approval.

The state agencies have more regulatory control over mobile home parks than municipalities, said Cecil Szeponski, owner of the Edgewood Mobile Home Park in St. Charles.

"(The Planning Commission vote) is just a formality," Szeponski said, "but they make you jump through so many hoops, they'll be lucky to break ground by next spring."

Well-managed mobile home parks raise the property value of neighboring homes, said Kenneth Bryant, a landscape engineer for Westphal Associates. The company designed the site plan for the project.

The homes will sell for \$60,000 to \$80,000, and the park won't resemble the aluminum-sided, single-unit mobile homes crammed in parks that residents might fear, Bryant said.

Homes will rest on concrete

slabs, and the developer will pay to extend water and sewer lines and to pave streets inside the park, he said. Plans for the grounds include a clubhouse, park, a series of ponds and a mile of walking trails.

"I don't see how they can call it an undesirable use of the property," said Ader, who noted the land for the proposed park sometimes floods and is between railroad tracks and a former landfill.

"No one is going to build \$250,000 homes back there," he said.

Township Manager Marcia A. Strong said that while she understands residents' concerns, they may find the park less offensive once construction is complete.

"It's this negative image they have of the trailer parks they built in the 1950s, when there weren't that many rules," she said. "It's affordable housing, and it's important for the community to meet the broad range of needs of different people." ■

Andy Grimm covers Thomas Township for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 766-9688.

## Acknowledgements

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Michael G. Sheppard

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