

**A History of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam, WI.**

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## A History of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam, Wi.

St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin is one of the older congregations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod but it is less known for its age and more for its size. St. Stephen's has been and continues to be one of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's largest congregations. As of 2006, the St. Stephen's family reached 2,538 baptized members and 2070 communicant members. This is quite opposite the situation St. Stephen's faced in 1875.

St. Stephen's was not the first Lutheran congregation in the city of Beaver Dam, but rather the second. St. Stephen's was organized on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1875 when 25 members of an existing Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam, along with Rev. Lucas, withdrew because of doctrinal errors creeping into this Church.

The charter members were: Daniel Birkholz, John Zieske, Ferdinand Schwandt, Carl Bartz, August Kaatz, Henry Kraeger, Julius Kuhnke, Franz Boese, Frederick Nimmer, John Hoffman, Frederick Schulze, Carl Neumann, Christian Hinz, Godfrey Beyer, Peter Birkenstock, William Hinz, Michael Mankowski, William Schultz, Robert Schroeder, August Fluegel, August Selchert, Herman Prellwitz, John Boettger, W. Schroeder.<sup>1</sup>

What was the reason that these men split from the Beaver Dam Lutheran Church to form a new congregation? We have their words stating why such a break was necessary.

Since the congregation in which we have thus far held membership, in a sinful manner, rejected our dear Lutheran Confession, and in a meeting held on the first Sunday in Advent, November 28, 1875, demanded of the pastor henceforth not to testify against the false religion of the Lodge, but to admit anyone to the Lord's Supper without examination, regardless of his impenitence; and since the congregation in that same meeting discontinued membership in their orthodox synod...we are conscience-bound to sever connections with such a gathering

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<sup>1</sup> Zum Golden Jubiläum der Ev. Luth. St. Stephans Gemeinde. (1925), 25

and meet today to organize a new congregation in which ,may God give grace, all preaching and practice shall at all times be conducted in accordance with the Word of God and the confessions of the Lutheran Church. We meet today, December 5, 1875, the second Sunday in Advent, for this our first congregational meeting in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

In that first meeting the newly formed congregation decided that they would find church property as soon as possible. Within one week of the forming of St. Stephen's, the newly elected Trustees had found property in Beaver Dam where they could gather together and worship. This property was located on the corner of Rowell and South Center Streets. There was a house and a barn existing on the property. The congregation agreed to purchase this land at the cost of \$1,000. After purchasing their new land, they got to work on remodeling the barn into their church. As small as it was, St. Stephen's congregation was happy to be worshipping in their newly dedicated church-barn. Christian education was present from the very beginning at St. Stephen's. The congregation didn't have a school building but used the church with its long pews for teaching as well.

From its very beginning St. Stephen's showed interest in supporting the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). In 1877 they showed their support for the Synod by giving their Thanksgiving offering to the Synod's college located in Watertown, Wi. That same year they also agreed to help support the building of a seminary.

Pastor Paul Lucas was the first Pastor of St. Stephen's little flock. But his ministry at St. Stephen's was somewhat brief. On March 17, 1878, after serving faithfully for three years, he accepted a call to a larger congregation. One article states:

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<sup>2</sup> Diamond Jubilee of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. (1950), 6

It surely must have been depressing for the little flock, when they learned that Pastor Lucas had received a call to another congregation; yet they submitted to the inevitable and gave him an honorable release.<sup>3</sup>

The next Pastor to serve St. Stephen's congregation was Pastor Probst. He was installed on Good Friday 1878. He served from 1878-1881. During his ministry at St. Stephen's the congregation attempted to sell or trade their existing property for a better one. But before all of the details were worked out, Pastor Probst was called to serve in Hartford Wis.

Pastor G. Muehlhauser was installed at St. Stephen's on September 5, 1881. During his ministry the property on Rowell and Center was sold and new property was purchased. In 1883, the city of Beaver Dam allowed St. Stephen's to move their church from its existing address at Rowel Street, across town and over the bridge, to their new location at the corner of West Maple Avenue and West Street. This is the existing property today. But before they could decide to build a new church to replace their barn, Pastor Muehlhauser accepted a call to Michigan.

Pastor Goldammer served next at St. Stephen's. He was the first pastor to serve longer than 5 years. He served a little over 10 years from 1885-1896. It was during Pastor Goldammer's ministry that the congregation at St. Stephen's finally outgrew their little church building. They decided to build a bigger church and they hired a local contractor to do the job for the price of \$1,826. In 1887 the church was completed and the 1887 cornerstone of that church can be found in rear of the present building. The old church was not destroyed but used for schooling. The church's first pipe organ was installed at this time as well. In 1889, St. Stephen's installed a pipe organ which would last until the year 1920 when it was replaced.

After serving for almost 11 years, Pastor Goldammer was forced to retire on account of illness. Pastor John Meyer, who later became a Professor at the college in Watertown and eventually became the president of the Seminary in Thiensville, was next to serve at St.

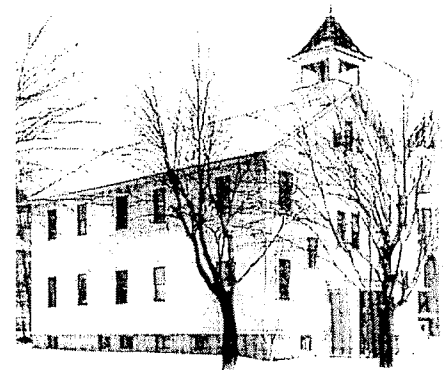
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<sup>3</sup> Zum Golden Jubiläum der Ev. Luth. St. Stephans Gemeinde. (1925), 26

Stephen's. He served from 1896-1902. Besides his pastoral duties, Pastor Meyer also took up the task of teaching the parochial school for four years. It wasn't until 1900 that St. Stephen's called its first full-time teacher, Mr. Hugo Krieg, from the ministerial school in New Ulm. Before this time, the pastors at St. Stephen's had done all of the teaching which consisted of Bible History, Catechism, reading, writing, arithmetic and singing. It wasn't until Pastor Meyer came to St. Stephen's that the full curriculum was added. This period in time also marked the beginning of a slow transition from German to English.

Pastor Meyer was called to teach at Northwestern College in 1902 and Pastor G. Stern was called to take his place at St. Stephen's. Pastor Stern served from 1902-1909. During his ministry the decision was made to build a church parsonage. Church bells were also installed at this time. St. Stephen's was rapidly growing and it was time once again to expand. They enlarged the church and also completely renovated the existing building.

In 1909, Pastor Stern received a call to serve in Leeds, Wisconsin. Pastor A.J. Arendt succeeded Pastor Stern in 1909 and served until 1915. It was during this time that St. Stephen's school was growing as well. Pastor Arendt led the charge in the building of a new school house which contained a classroom, a confirmation room and a room used for church meetings. With the growth of the school came the need for more help. St.



**Wood School: 1913**

Stephen's called C.G.F. Brenner from Kaukauna to teach. This was the starting point of St. Stephen's School becoming a full eight grade school. The enrollment in 1914 was 50 and it continued to grow steadily.

# Daily Citizen.

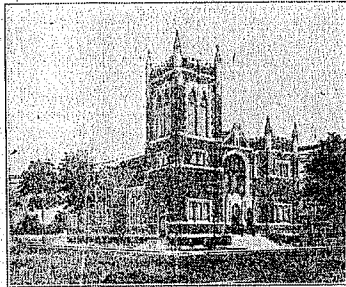
(VICE)

BEAVER DAM, WISCONSIN, MONDAY, JUNE 23, 1919.

## \$75,000 CHURCH WILL BE BUILT BY LUTHERANS

St. Stephen's Lutheran Congregation have let Contract to the Hutter Construction Company for a \$75,000 Edifice Which Will be Completed by Jan. 1, 1920. Will Have Seating Capacity of 800. Interior and Exterior Built Along Gothic Architecture.

Another mighty fine and costly building is to be added to Beaver Dam, Wis., the St. Stephen's Lutheran congregation has signed a contract with The Hutter Construction Company of Grand Marais and Beaver Dam for the erection of a \$75,000 church at the corner of West Maple avenue and West street, to be completed by January 1, 1920. The new edifice will be located on the same site as the present St. Stephen's church, the work of removing this building from the premises being started this morning. One hundred and twenty-foot long and a height of seventy feet on West street will be the foundation of the new building, the walls being constructed of masonry, rough rock being resting on a concrete foundation. All outside trimmings will be of white granite and the accompanying stone of the new building will give some idea of the Gothic style to be followed in the construction work. This style will be closely adhered to inside and outside. The roof will be of slate and copper; metal will be used for all exposed parts. All colored glass windows are called for which will give the exterior of the new church a most distinctive and dignified appearance.



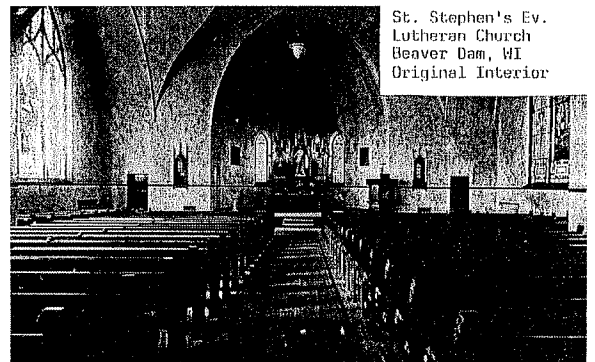
New St. Stephen's Lutheran Church to be constructed in Beaver Dam and ready for occupancy by January 1, 1920.

Ministry at St. Stephen's seemed to be going well while Pastor Arendt served but there was a sudden shock when Pastor Arendt resigned not only from St. Stephen's but he left the WELS to join a different synod, the General Council. Pastor L.C. Kirst was called to fill the sudden vacancy at St. Stephen's. He served at Stephen's for 50 years, from 1915-1965. With the steady growth of members, it was time once again to re-build. This time, instead of renovation, St. Stephen's decided to build an entirely

new church. The total cost of this project was \$76,000. However, to keep from going into debt, the congregation agreed to pay it in full by raising the money beforehand. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1920 the new church was dedicated and ready for use. This building is also the present standing building.

Pastor Kirst saw tremendous growth during his 50 years at St. Stephen's. He introduced the first English worship services at St. Stephen's. Both German and English services were held every Sunday until 1958. He served as the single pastor until 1942, when, due to growth, St.

Stephen's saw the need to call an assistant pastor. Pastor Louis Pingel accepted the call to serve as an assistant pastor and teacher in 1942 but his ministry in Beaver Dam was short lived as he accepted a call to Arizona only a year and one-half later. With Pastor Kirst as the lone pastor once again, St. Stephen's decided to fill the vacancy temporarily



St. Stephen's Ev. Lutheran Church Beaver Dam, WI Original Interior

by bringing in guest preachers once a month.

During the mid 1900's there were a number of repairs and improvements going on in both the church and parsonage. A number of walls were in-laid with brick, the floors were re-done and the parsonage kitchen was remodeled. But more importantly, 1949, the desire to start a kindergarten arose among many of the parents in the congregation so that Miss Dorothy Wendlandt was installed as the first kindergarten teacher at St. Stephen's. 1949 also marked the year in which St. Stephen's started having two English services, one starting at 7:30 A.M. and the other at 9:00 A.M.. This left only one German service at 10:30 A.M. The year of 1950 was a busy year for St. Stephen's. The Synod organized a new mission church in Beaver Dam, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. The congregation of St. Stephen's gave their unanimous support in organizing this sister church as stated by this quote.

In the Fall of 1949 the district Mission Board of the Western District of our Synod proposed to our congregation a plan whereby the Synod would support the organization of a mission church on the north side of the city, if agreeable to St. Stephen's. In our annual meeting in January of this year (1950) the proposal was unanimously accepted with the result that on the second Sunday after Easter the organization of a daughter congregation was effected. In keeping with the name of the Sunday, when the organization took place, the very appropriate name Good Shepherd was chosen. The newly organized congregation called Rev. Alvin Degner of St. John's Church, Town of Trenton, with the consent of St. John's, to be pastor also of Good Shepherd congregation in Beaver Dam.<sup>4</sup>

In that same year of 1950, St. Stephen's congregation celebrated their Diamond Jubilee, marking 75 years of God's grace. In recognition of this celebration the church decided to take on a renovation program consisting of many different repairs and improvements. The lighting system was replaced with modern fixtures, the interior walls of the church were washed down, and redecorating took place. All of these renovations were completed by the time of the Jubilee. In

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<sup>4</sup> Diamond Jubilee of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. (1950), 14

all, the cost of these improvements was \$15, 175.25.<sup>5</sup> At the time of their 75 year celebration there were 2, 087 baptized souls along with 1,522 communicant members. The rapid growth of the congregation continued on through the 1950's. Because of the growth, there were also many additions going on at school. 6 more classrooms were added, gym, 2 shower rooms, kitchen, band room and athletic supply room.

With the increase of members there came the need for a second full time pastor. Pastor Harold Johne was called to serve at St. Stephen's in 1957 and he served until 1961 when he was called to St. Paul, Minnesota. Pastor Kirst and Pastor Johne saw many changes at St. Stephen's in the next few years. With the increase of members, renovations, additions to the property, growth in the Christian Day School, and addition of a second pastor, the church constitution needed some revising. The church council changed to included 9 men and there were other elected boards added: The Board of Education, Board of District Elders, and Board of Property Maintenance. All of these boards met at council meetings as well. In 1963, just before Pastor Kirst would retire, the church elected to use the liturgy that was found in the Synod's hymnal. This was a big deal for previously a special liturgy was printed and pasted in each hymnal for use in the church services.<sup>6</sup>

In the middle of all of these changes and additions, there was another change to the pastoral staff. Pastor Johne had taken his call to St. Paul, leaving Pastor Kirst once again as the lone minister. In 1961 St. Stephen's decided to call Pastor Elton Huebner to fill the vacancy. Pastor Huebner served from 1961 to 1976. But shortly after Pastor Huebner arrived, St. Stephen's longest serving pastor retired from the ministry. Pastor Kirst retired from St. Stephen's in 1965 and lived out the rest of his life at that congregation until the Lord called him

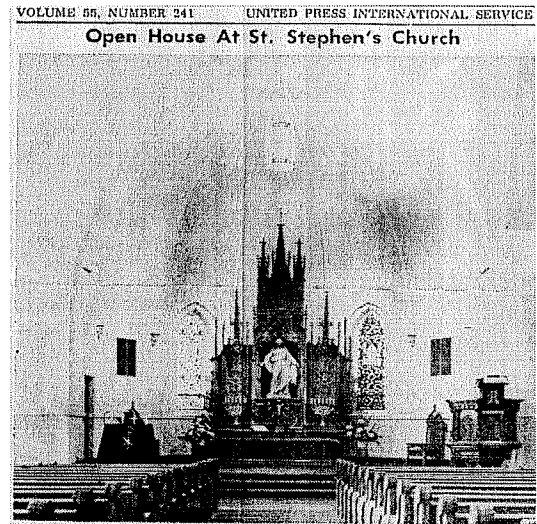
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<sup>5</sup> History of St. Stephen's. As gathered by Rev. Kirst.

<sup>6</sup> One Hundredth Anniversary of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church. (1975), 5



home in 1975. St. Stephen's then called Pastor Darwin Raddatz to serve along side Pastor Huebner. Pastor Raddatz served as pastor at St. Stephen's for 5 years from 1965-1970. At the time that Pastor Raddatz received his call, St. Stephen's was in the process of celebrating another anniversary. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church was observed in 1965 and once again was recognized with special improvements, gifts and renovations. Just prior to the celebration the congregation hired the Schaeffer Organ Company



**90<sup>th</sup> anniversary interior remodeling**

from Slinger, Wisconsin to come and rebuild their pipe organ which they had purchased in 1920. The organ was rebuilt at a cost of \$14,000. Next, the interior of the church was redecorated and the lighting system was rewired and enlarged. The church's basement was remodeled and a new heating system was installed as well. At this time, the church saw it necessary to build two new parsonages for their pastors, Huebner and Raddatz. The homes are located at 817 May Street and 1000 Mary Street. The total cost of the organ, improvements and parsonages totaled \$121,000.<sup>7</sup>

St. Stephen's saw many changes and blessings in the 1970's as well. After Pastor Raddatz was called to teach at Dr. Martin Luther College in 1970, Pastor William Balza received a call to serve at St. Stephen's. Pastor Huebner and Balza initiated 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Confirmation Instructions for those not attending St. Stephen's Lutheran Day School. Two years later, the Pioneer program came to St. Stephen's as well. Another of the wonderful programs at

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<sup>7</sup> One Hundredth Anniversary of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church. (1975), 7

St. Stephen's was the radio program, which had its beginning in 1973. The Pastors of St. Stephen's congregation along with members would tape a special radio worship service to send to the shut-in members of the congregation. This program exists today. But as one new program was being initiated, another program was dying out. In 1958, the German services were cut back to twice a month, and then in 1962 they were cut to only once a month. In 1969 the German services were only held on holidays, and in January of 1973 they were lost altogether.<sup>8</sup>

Within the next three years, the St. Stephen's pastoral staff would completely change; in 1974, St. Stephen's joined the Lakeside Lutheran High school Federation in Lake Mills, Wisconsin. This was also the year that Pastor Balza took a call to serve in South Haven, Michigan. From 1973-1975, a vicar was supplied to help carry some of the pastoral duties as Pastor Huebner was the only full-time minister. But in 1976, Pastor Huebner took a call to be Executive Secretary of the Synod Board of Trustees. But right before Pastor Huebner left, Pastor Myron Sordahl accepted the call to come and serve at St. Stephen's. And then, not to long afterward, Pastor James Kleist received a call as well.

So, from 1974-1976, St. Stephen's had gone through two vicars and now had two new pastors. Right in the middle of all these changes St. Stephen's celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. They celebrated with four special thanksgiving services on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1975. As with past anniversaries, this event was also celebrated with additions and renovations. A new narthex was built and an enclosed ramp was added to the church. They put in a new speaker system, rebuilt and refinished the pews and also installed new carpet. After a number of other smaller items the total cost of the anniversary renovation was \$135,000. With all of these additions to the church came the addition of another pastor. In 1979, Pastor Wilber Schulz, a semi retired pastor, was

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<sup>8</sup> History of St. Stephen's. As gathered by Pastor Huebner

added to the pastoral team to make 2 full time pastors and an assistant. He served at St. Stephen's from 1979-1995.

Pastor Kleist was called to serve in Cudahy, Wisconsin in 1983. And Pastor Mark Lindner was called to fill the vacancy. Pastor Lindner served from 1983-2006. Pastor Sordahl and Pastor Linder helped to continue the emphasis of Evangelism which St. Stephen's had carried throughout its years. In 1986, a formal Evangelism began which sought many and different opportunities to share Jesus with the community. In 1988, Pastor Sordahl was called to Westland Michigan and Pastor Steve Blumer was called to replace him at St. Stephen's. Pastor Blumer served from 1988-1997. At this time, a number of new programs aimed at Evangelism were initiated at St. Stephen's. A special Christmas Eve Candlelight service began in 1988 with its emphasis on outreach. The radio ministry expanded at this time as well; they supported radio and newspaper advertisement with a mission thrust and they also began printing copies of their sermons along with cassette recordings of the worship services for those who requested them.

As St. Stephen's continued to grow in membership, opportunities and programs, they saw the need for a third full-time pastor. In 1991, they called Pastor Leon Ehlert to this position. He served from 1991-1996. Pastors Lindner, Blumer, Ehlert and Schulz saw many changes during the 90's. The church was redecorated in 1991 and a new church office was added. An Elevator and an extra classroom were also built in 1992. The total cost of all of these additions was \$345,000. The renovations and additions came to an end at that time with the building of the third parsonage in 1995 for the amount of \$107,000. 1995 was also the year that Pastor Wilbert Schulz retired from his position of pastoral assistant. This left St. Stephen's with 3 full-time pastors.

In 1996, Pastor Ehlert was called to teach at Fox Valley High School in Appleton, Wisconsin and St. Stephen's called Pastor Todd Engel to take his place. Pastor Engel served at St. Stephen's from 1996-1999. Soon after the arrival of Pastor Engel, Pastor Blumer accepted a call to serve in Orlando, Florida. St. Stephen's called Pastor Philip Heyer to replace Pastor Blumer and St. Stephen's was back to 3 full-time pastors again; Pastors Lindner, Engel and Heyer. But this didn't last long for in 1999 Pastor Engel was called to Keystone Heights in Florida. At this time St. Stephen's was faced with the decision of whether or not to call a third full-time pastor again. They called Pastor David Bode as a part-time pastor but that lasted for only a short time as the congregation again saw the need for 3 full-time pastors. Pastor Bode took on more responsibility and St. Stephen's called him as a full-time pastor.

St. Stephen's celebrated its 125 year anniversary in 2000 with many gifts and changes. A special thanksgiving offering was collected during this time and 40% was used to pad the pews in the church, build handicapped bathrooms in the church basement and begin a new organ fund. They also gave 30% of this special offering to adopt a mission in Houghton, Michigan for a year and also to provide support for a special foreign mission project in Eastern Europe. 10% of this offering was also given to aid the young men and women who attended Lakeside Lutheran High School in Lake Mills, Wisconsin.

St. Stephen's was able to add a vicar to the pastoral staff in 2004. 3 vicars have served at St. Stephen's at the time of the writing of this history; Greg Pufahl, Jon Zimpelmann, and Paul Jenkins. St. Stephen's was also blessed with another addition in 2006. After five years of planning, a new church organ was installed by Berghaus Organ Company. The organ consists of 1,907 pipes and cost \$496,540.

From 2004-2006 the pastoral staff at St. Stephen's consisted of 3 full-time pastors and a vicar. But in August of 2006, Pastor Bode retired from the full-time ministry and moved to Appleton. St. Stephen's then called Pastor Mark Wendland to fill Pastor Bode's spot. Changes continued as Pastor Lindner accepted a call to Janesville, Wisconsin only months later. As of the writing of this history, the pastoral staff of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church consists of Pastor Philip Heyer, Pastor Mark Wendland, and Vicar Paul Jenkins. St. Stephen's is in the process of calling another full-time pastor to serve their congregation. As we look back on the history of this church-body, we see a congregation that has been richly blessed by the Lord. From its very beginning St. Stephen's has had tremendous growth in membership. At the time of this writing St. Stephen's is a family of 2,538 baptized members, 2070 communicants, and 166 children taught by 10 teachers. They have a Sunday School of 58 children which is taught 8 teachers. St. Stephen's also has 17 students presently attending worker training schools along with 20 students attending Lakeside Lutheran.<sup>9</sup> To whom can we attribute all of these blessings? God alone has been with Stephen's and has richly blessed it. There were stormy periods in the congregation's 131 year history but the preaching of the Word is what held it together. We look forward to see what blessings the Lord has in mind for His Church as it continues to cling to Him.

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<sup>9</sup> History of St. Stephen's. As gathered by Pastor Mark Lindner.

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