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St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church of Cudahy, Wisconsin:

A Congregation Committed to Christian Education

by

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Senior Church History

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Christian Education from the Start

In 1892 Patrick Cudahy decided to build a packing plant 7 miles from downtown Milwaukee along the shore of Lake Michigan. He bought up much more land than he needed for his plant, since his plans also included surrounding the plant with a city. In the same year in which the Cudahy Brothers plant was completed and began operations, six Lutheran men, aided by Pastor B. P. Nommensen of St. Lucas Congregation in Milwaukee, set out to find a Lutheran Church in this new community. Land was purchased from the Cudahy Brothers Land Company. The land consisted of three lots of 101 feet on Cudahy and Swift Avenue. Only a short time later a congregation was founded. Pastor Nommensen relates:

On July 17th [1893] the documents of Incorporation were filed by John Kipphutt Franz Sternke, Otto Bredow, Karl Schendel, August Mueller and Friedrich Mahn. Mr Otto Bredow was elected as President, John Kipphutt as Treasurer and they decided that the name should be: The Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's Congregation of Cudahy, Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

In the same year as the congregation's incorporation a church was built. And on January 28, 1894, the first regular meeting of the small congregation was held. For the first three years of its existence the congregation was served by Pastor Nommensen and by Pastor Koch of Zion congregation in South Milwaukee. Already at this early time, before a regular pastor had arrived, we find first mention of a school in the congregational minutes. In a meeting on April 20, 1896, the

disposition and handling of "school money" was decided upon. Thus, the little congregation in Cudahy had resolved to open its own school even before it has its first pastor. Little did those early members of St. Paul's know that this school would one day enroll as many as 170 students. The interest in Christian Education was there from the very beginning.

### Christian Education in the Church Basement

In ~~1920~~ St. Paul's together with St. John's Congregation of New Coeln on Howell Avenue called and received its first pastor. Pastor John Brenner, a graduate of the Wisconsin Synod Theological Seminary, would serve both congregations faithfully for 12 years. Upon Pastor Brenner's arrival arrangements were immediately made to open a Christian Day School. Five months later, September 1, 1896, Pastor Brenner began teaching 12 children in a room in the basement of the church. This marked the opening of the school. Pastor Brenner must have been well received as a teacher. By the end of the first month enrollment had risen to 19 and by Christmas it was up to 22.

The janitorial work in the school was carried out by the older students under the supervision of Pastor Brenner. Stoves were used for heat, and wood was brought and cut to fit the fire pot. The school prospered. In 1903 a partition was placed in the basement of the church to make it a two room school. In October of that year Miss Victoria Lueders was called to teach the lower grades, while Pastor Brenner continued to teach the upper grades. In 1904 the congregation had the foresight to purchase a thick patch of woods across the street from the

church. This land would eventually be cleared and become the construction site of the present school building.<sup>4</sup>

In 1908 Pastor Brenner accepted a call to St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. The members of St. Paul's appreciated what their Pastor had done for their congregation and their school and were sad to see him leave. Men of the congregation would later recall their unashamed weeping as they sang the last song under Pastor Brenner's direction. But the congregation lost no time in calling a successor, this time independently of St. John's of New Coeln. Pastor Fred Zarling of Woodville, Wisconsin accepted the call.<sup>5</sup>

Pastor Zarling doubled as pastor and teacher until he accepted a call in Minnesota in October of 1911. After his departure the congregation experienced a ten month vacancy. During the vacancy A. Luethy was employed to teach the upper grades in the school and Ada Koehler, who had replaced Victoria Lueders in 1905, taught the lower grades. Seminary students conducted Sunday services at the church.

During this vacancy the school experienced the first real threat to its existence. The congregation, in financial stress, first attempted to unite again with St. John's of New Coeln and to that end called Pastor A. Lederer who was serving St. John's at the time. When this attempt failed an attempt was made to unite with the St. John's Slovak Lutheran Church of Cudahy. This attempt also fell through. Difficulties in getting a pastor coupled with financial problems resulted in a meeting on November 28, 1911 in which the voters of the congregation voted to close the school and dismiss the teachers the following day.

During this difficult time the the history of St. Paul's the teachers and one of the congregation's ex-pastors were instrumental in keeping the school going. In spite of the congregation's resolution to close the school the teachers stuck to their posts even though they knew they would not be paid. And on December 12, 1911, Pastor Brenner presided at a meeting in which he offered the congregation a \$300.00 gift from a Mrs. Sophie Meyer of Milwaukee and \$25.00 from himself if the congregation would reconsider its resolution to close the school. The congregation accepted the offer and borrowed an additional \$325.00 from the Synod's Church Extension Fund. This loan would later be paid off by the Ladies Aid. The loan together with the gift provided the balance necessary to cover the deficit in the treasury. The school was saved.

It was not until August of the following year that the congregation again had a pastor. In August of 1912 Paul Pieper became pastor of St. Paul's. The fact that the congregation again had its own pastor seemed to give it new life. Things began to run smoothly again. At a January meeting in 1913 it was reported that four men had offered to give \$400.00 if the rest of the members would raise \$1000.00. The collection was successfully completed in the following year. The church and its school again seemed to be flourishing. In 1919 the congregation celebrated its 25th anniversary.

An important step in the history of the school was taken in 1920 when the first male teacher was called. In July of that year Gilbert Glaeser accepted the call. Although he only served at St. Paul's for one year, his stay marked the beginning of a

new era in which the congregation supported one pastor and two  
8  
teachers.

### Christian Education in the School Building

Another change in pastors took place in 1922 when Pastor Pieper accepted a call to St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Milwaukee. Four days later Paul Gieschen was called. It was during Pastor Gieschen's years at St. Paul's that plans to build a school were made and carried out. Beginning with October of 1922 the minutes make repeated mention of a building project. It started with a recommendation from the Ladies Aid that the congregation build a hall:

Since the Ladies' Aid Society wants to build a hall and has asked the congregation for permission, a committee of seven men was appointed by the chairman to confer with the Ladies' Aid concerning this building. The committee consists of John Radke, Paul Tetzlaff, Wm. Wieland, Richard Schoenborn, Fred Simon, Erich Jeske, and John Strandt.<sup>9</sup>

As the school enrollment grew it became evident that a school building was needed. In 1923 the enrollment was up to 91, making conditions in the church basement inadequate and dangerous. On March 5, 1923 the Church Council recommended the building of a school and a hall:

The committee of seven reported again, and after lengthy discussion it was decided that if a building is built, a combination hall and school be built according to the recommendation of the church council.<sup>10</sup>

In July of the same year the recommendation was accepted and the treasurer was authorized to accept money for the new school building. The congregation decided to elect a committee to see

how much money could be raised. The church was to be divided into four districts each district to be visited by a committee.

Construction on the school began in 1926 on the lots which had been purchased in 1904 across the street from the church. A \$25,000.00 bond issue was floated that year and the following year a mortgage of \$5,000.00 was taken up and later an additional \$3,000.00 was borrowed to complete the building. The building was completed and dedicated in January, 1927. Pupils and teachers occupied the school the next month.

In October of that year Pastor Gieschen accepted a call as professor at the Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. After four unsuccessful attempts at calling a successor Pastor Gerald Hoenecke, from Shirley, Wisconsin, accepted the call to become pastor at St. Paul's and was installed on February 12, 1928.

During the years that Pastor Hoenecke served at St. Paul's the depression began to take its toll on the congregation and its school. Deficits accumulated and payments on the principal of the debt could not be made. Even the payment of the interest had to be postponed with the consent of the bondholders. The following letter to the bondholder shows the financial struggle the congregation was going through and its desire to continue providing Christian Education for its children:

Dear Bondholder:

We are most reluctantly compelled to advise you of the situation as it has unfolded itself in the past months in our congregation in regard to our interest on the bond issue.

It became apparent to us this spring that it would be doubtful as to whether we could maintain our Christian Day School and meet our interest payments as well. In order to acquaint all our members with this situation a special meeting was called to discuss the advisability of closing or partly closing our school.

At this meeting the sentiment was almost unanimous that since the building was erected for school purposes and since the Christian training of children in a Christian Day School is of such vital importance, and whereas we have been able to meet our obligations up to the present time, we should not feel discouraged but should continue our school and exercise every effort in raising sufficient funds to meet these obligations in the future. In accordance with this sentiment and a resolution adopted at this meeting our teachers, who were on their vacation, were notified to this effect and a hopeful future was looked forward to.

As time went on conditions in general have steadily become worse affecting many of our members so that our income has been steadily decreasing to a point where we have to face the stern reality of not being able to meet our interest payments. It is even difficult for us to meet our current expenses so that salaries are not being paid promptly. And since our members made such great sacrifices to enable us to pay our last interest installment we are convinced that present conditions having grown worse they are not able to duplicate those efforts at this time.

We are not unmindful of the fact that we are under a solemn obligation to our bond holders and if it were possible to borrow the necessary amount, we would be glad to do so, but various inquiries at the banks for relief have given us a clear realization that it is impossible to rely on any help from that source.

We have therefore at this time no alternative but to ask you to withhold your interest coupons and bear with us until such a time when conditions will improve enabling us to resume our interest payments. As soon as this becomes possible we will correspond with you.

We welcome any inquiry or advice from our bond holders that would be of mutual benefit. Address your communications to the Treasurer of the Building Fund, Mr. E. C. Petri, 920 Packard Ave., Cudahy, Wis.

In closing, let us assure you that we deeply regret the necessity of taking this step and that as Christians we will apply ourselves to the utmost, so that we might be able to resume interest payments as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,  
Edw. C. Petri  
Treasurer of the Building  
Fund

By 1933 it looked as though the financial crisis would force the congregation to close the school. But in a meeting on May 25 a plan was proposed and accepted which would make it possible for the school to continue to operate. Mrs. G. Hoenecke and Mrs E.



Wilde offered to teach the lower grades practically free of charge. Each was to receive the sum of \$5.00 per month. At a time when it seemed to many that the school could not continue, the unselfish offer of these two women made it possible for the school to remain in operation.

12

Having weathered this second storm, the church and its school again prospered. In October, 1946, the 50th Anniversary of the school was celebrated. A special Anniversary collection was taken and the money was used to make improvements on the school. Among other things, new desks were purchased for the school. Pastor Hoenecke accepted a call to Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, in December and was replaced in June of 1947 by Pastor Heinrich Vogel. The following year a third teacher was added to the school together with a full time kindergarten teacher. About a year later the debt on the school building was finally paid off. A special ceremony ~~was~~ at a social gathering was held soon after at which the last note was burned publicly.

13

On February 14, 1956, Pastor Vogel accepted a call to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin. Pastor Paul Kuehl of Mandan, North Dakota accepted the call to replace him and was installed on July 15. A fourth teacher was added to the school in 1958 and discussions began to arise concerning the possibility of expanding the school facilities. It was decided that two rooms would be added. Work was begun in August of 1960 and completed by the next spring. The dedication was held on Sunday March 19, 1961.

Not long after the dedication Pastor Kuehl accepted a call to teach at Northwestern College in October of 1961. After one

unsuccessful call Pastor Roy Brassow accepted the call to St. Paul's. In 1964 property in back of the school was acquired for further expansion of the school. A major event during Pastor Brassow's stay at St. Paul's was the building of a new church.<sup>14</sup> On May 25, 1968, the new church was dedicated.

### Christian Education Still a Concern

In 1982 Pastor Brassow accepted a call to Huntsville, Alabama and was succeeded in August of the following year by the present pastor, James Kleist. Christian Education is still a major concern to the Pastor and members of St. Paul's. Current enrollment at the school is about 110. Five called teachers instruct children in grades K-8. In the fall of 1986 St. Paul's also opened a preschool for four year old children.

Plans for building a new school have also begun. The present school building has served the congregation well, but is now over 60 years old and is often in need repair. The congregation has looked into the cost of building a new school and has begun to set significant amounts of money aside for this purpose. The feeling of the congregation is that even if a new school cannot be funded today at least money can be put away so that a new school can be built some years down the road.

St. Paul's can be thankful that the Lord has always provided this congregation with school-minded pastors and faithful teachers. Under their leadership may the members continue to be a congregation committed to Christian Education.

E N D N O T E S

1. Nommensen, B. P., Story of the Founding of the Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's Congregation of Cudahy, Wisconsin, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
2. Loc. cit.
3. St. Paul's 50th Anniversary: 1893-1943, Cudahy, Wisconsin
4. Ibid.
5. 50th Anniversary of St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Christian Day School, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
6. History of St. Paul's Congregation, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
7. St. Paul's 50th Anniversary: 1893-1943, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
8. Ibid.
9. Historical Notes on the Building of St. Paul's Luth. School, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
10. Ibid.
11. History of St. Paul's Congregation, Cudahy, Wisconsin.
12. Minutes of the Meeting of the Church and School Boards and the Finance Committee, St. Paul's Ev. Luth. Church, Cudahy, Wisconsin, April 21, 1933.
13. St. Paul's 60th Anniversary: 1893-1953, Cudahy, Wisconsin, p.3.
14. St. Paul's 70th Anniversary: 1893-1963, Cudahy, Wisconsin.