

Mt. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church  
La Crosse, Wisconsin (1928-1978)

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I first became interested in Mt. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church indirectly through my wife, Mary (Leibl) Warnecke. She was a member of Mt. Calvary before we were married. We attended a number of services both before and after we were wed. I have also preached and assisted in a few services there during my years at the Seminary. And most importantly, Mary and I were married at Mt. Calvary, by Pastor Glenn Moldenhauer who is presently the pastor of the congregation at Mt. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the events that transpired during the beginning years of Mt. Calvary up through 1978. Of course, because of the building, buying, expanding, etc. of the early years of this church, more will be said concerning these events. Some names will be mentioned and some names will not be mentioned. I included certain names as key members in the church's history, and also other names who were participants in original activities and memberships in the church. Realistically, I couldn't have listed all the names of the members during these years. This was God's first fifty years of grace to Mt. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The first service was held at the Nurses' Home of the Lutheran Hospital on February 26, 1928. Rev. I.M. Brackebusch of Stoddard, Wisconsin delivered the sermon. On the following Sunday, the first Sunday School session was also conducted at

the Nurses' Home. Nine children attended that first session. On March 18, Rev. Theodore J. Mueller of Waukesha, Wisconsin, assistant to the executives of the Mission Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States, conducted his first service for Mt. Calvary. In March he also performed the first adult baptisms of Mrs. Gross and Mrs. John Grimm. The first congregational meeting was held April 27. Mt. Calvary was organized and it was also resolved to draw up a constitution and by-laws. And on June 3, Rev. Theodore J. Mueller was installed as Mt. Calvary's first pastor.

The congregation was incorporated on June 7. Articles of Incorporation were signed by Rev. Mueller, Roy Wempen, Orlando Sauer, Oscar Sorenson, A.O. Wangen, Archie Peters, and H.G. Sontag. On this same date, the first child was born into the congregation. Donald Wayne Gaskill was born to Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Gaskill and was baptized on June 17, 1928 at the hospital. On June 18 the constitution and by-laws were adopted and the first officers were elected. They were: President, Roy Wempen; Vice-president, Archie Peters; Secretary, Oscar Sorenson; Treasurer, A.O. Wangen; Board of Trustees: H.G. Sontag, A.O. Wangen, John Schmeckpeper; and Board of Elders: Ralph Burand, Fred W. Schlicht, and Archie Peters. The building of a new church was the topic of interest. The present site at Sixteenth Street and Park Avenue was selected.

On August 31 the first shovel of soil was turned by Pastor Mueller, and building operations were begun. The first annual picnic was held September 23, sponsored jointly by the congregation and the Young Peoples' Society. The first marriage ceremony was performed October 4, by Pastor Mueller at the parsonage. Ethel Burand married Adolph Quall. Since I mentioned the word parsonage, Mt. Calvary's first parsonage, from 1928 to 1932, was a house rented by the congregation at 2220 West Avenue South. From 1932 to 1934 a house at 13th and Johnson Streets was rented as the parsonage. On July 23, 1934, at a special meeting of the congregation, a decision was made to build a parsonage on the property owned by the congregation at 16th and Park Avenue. The new parsonage was dedicated on November 25, 1934.

On October 25, 1928, the Ladies' Aid Society was organized and met at the parsonage with Mrs. Mueller as the first hostess. The following ladies were present: T.F. Berny, Lillian Broitzmann, Mrs. A. Burand, Mrs. D. Gaskill, Mrs. C. Klawitter, Mrs. F. Schlicht, Mrs. J. Schmeckpeper, Mrs. E. Neiheisel, and Mrs. A. Wernecke. On November 11 the last service was held in the Nurses' Home of the Lutheran Hospital. And on November 25, the new church building was dedicated..

The communicants with continual membership for 25 years at Mt. Calvary who became members before the dedication of the church building (from February 26, 1928 to November 18, 1928) were: Mr. and Mrs. John Schmeckpeper, Lilian Klawitter, Ralph Burand, Mrs. Adolf Burand, Viola (Burand) Ragner, Mrs. Ervinn

Neiheisel, Mrs. and Mrs. Fred Schlicht, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Gaskill, and Mr. and Mrs. Albert Wernecke. Additional communicants with continual membership for 25 years who joined during the first year of the church's existence were: Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Quall, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Klawitter, Mrs. William Lampert. The first pianist and organist at Mt. Calvary was Miss Lilian Klawitter. The first superintendent of the Sunday School was Roy Wempen..

Here is a summary of Mt. Calvary's first year of progress. Membership included 73 souls, 52 communicant members and 19 voting members. Sunday School ended up with 84 students enrolled with four teachers. The catechism class attendance was four adults and ten children. There were 18 children baptized and two adults, and only one wedding. Eugene Bergholz was the director of the choir. The Young Peoples' Society and Bible Class had 26 members. The Ladies' Aid Society was eight members strong. And permission was granted to the president, Roy Wempen, to publish a parish paper.

Year two, 1929, began January 14 with the first annual meeting of the congregation. In March the first adult confirmation class was confirmed in their faith. Members of that class were Mrs. Gross, Mrs. John Grimm, Mrs. T.H. Allen and Miss Florence Schade. The first Mission Festival was held September 8. There were two English services and one German service. The Ladies Aid Society served both dinner and supper. The erection of the bell tower took place in November. ~~The~~

The bell was a gift from the Immanuel Lutheran Church, North La Crosse. November 17 brought the first anniversary of the dedication of the church.

On February 3, 1930, the constitution and by-laws of the proposed Men's Club were approved by the congregation, and then organized February 7. Along with Palm Sunday of this year also came the first confirmation of children. The class included Pearl Anderson, Wilbert Bruhnke, Erwin Burand, Gwendolyn Cellar, Zelma Dennison, Edwin Klawitter, Marie Lange, Harold Lensor, Doris Neumann, Ruby Schlifer, Dorothy Wangen, Beatrice Weig and Irma Wrobel. In August an invitation from the congregation of First Lutheran Church in La Crosse to send Mt. Calvary's children of school age to their Christian Day School was accepted.

1931 brought the first death of a member, Mrs. Rudolph Pieper, who was buried at Caledonia, Minnesota. In August candles for the altar were authorized.

In February of 1932, it was decided that German services were to be held only on the second and fourth Sundays of the month instead of every Sunday. The church auditorium was decorated in July by E.O. Forseth. On the 17th, renovation services were held.

November 19, 1933, brought the fifth anniversary of the dedication of the church. Total child baptisms numbered 120. Total child confirmations was 35. Total adult confirmations added up to 61.

A new parsonage was built and dedicated on November 25, 1934. Not too much happened from 1935 to 1937; but membership still grew.

On July 5, 1938, the work of remodeling, reinforcing, and enlarging the church was approved.

The October of 1939 came and the Sunday School enrollment reached a high of 223 pupils with a staff of 18 teachers.

In 1940 Mt. Calvary purchased and dedicated a new pipe organ. The German services were dropped July 7. Two English services, one at 7:00a.m. and one at 9:00a.m. were to be held every Sunday starting on July 21. In December the church council's recommendation discouraging money making affairs within the congregation was passed.

In the December of 1941, 238 pupils were enrolled in the Sunday School. This is the highest on record. The Ladies' Aid Society also disbanded this year.

But in 1942, on February 18, the Ladies' Mission Society was organized. 1943 brought another year of God's grace to Mt. Calvary. In 1944, the interior of the church was redecorated throughout. And in 1945 the church debt was entirely liquidated.

1947 came and in July Pastor T.J. Mueller received and accepted a call to be assistant pastor of Emmaus Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, the largest congregation of the Synodical Conference in Wisconsin. Pastor H.F. Backer was then called to Mt. Calvary from Chaseburg, Wisconsin. Pastor Backer was

installed September 21 by Pastor Fritz Miller of First Lutheran Church in La Crosse. On September 28, Junior Youth League was organized for boys and girls of the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. Senior Youth League was organized October 19 for boys and girls of grades 10, 11, and 12. The Luther High School drive began also in October.

In February 1948, because of increased attendance, two services were to be held each Sunday. The 8:15 service had an attendance of 166, and 177 in the 10:45 service. On April 12 the congregation approved a Saturday Bible School, a Boy's Club and a Girl's Club. The Saturday Bible School began May 1 with an enrollment of 80 pupils. On May 12 the Girl's Club was organized and the Boy's Club was organized May 17. On May 19, Mt. Calvary's softball team was in uniform for the first time. A drive was launched July 4, to raise \$2,500 in the congregation as their share of Synod's Million Dollar Centennial Thank Offering. In August, Miss Lucile Langacker assumed her duties as a Christian Day School teacher. The first Girl's Club Parent Night was held September 28 with 100 per cent attendance of members and parents. On October 6 the Junior Choir was organized with Miss Lan<sup>g</sup>acker as director. Mt. Calvary's Women's Guild (mothers' club) was organized October 14. On November 21, the twentieth anniversary of the dedication of the church building was celebrated. Pastor T.J. Mueller was the guest speaker in the morning service, and Pastor G.A. Ernst from St. Paul was the guest speaker at the evening service. Walther Albrecht was the



organist and choir director.

In 1949 a successful stewardship drive was launched employing over 80 men in the congregation.

New altar cloths in white and violet were made by members of Mission Circle 2 in 1950. The congregation also voted to begin gathering funds for a new educational unit.

In 1951 some remodeling and renovating were done on the church. On August 13-17, Mt. Calvary was on the air over WKBH. In August Mrs. Elizabeth Mittelstaedt was appointed principal of the Saturday Bible School.

In February 1952 the Mr. and Mrs. Club was organized. Church attendance on Sunday mornings has been averaging 430. In March new cabinets and a library display were built in the assembly room. On March 13, 1952 the first international wedding was held at Mt. Calvary when Donald Gaskill and Miss Ursula Patzelt of Berlin, Germany, were united in marriage. A high school students' Bible class was started September 10. This was a planned four-year course with graduation upon completion.

1953 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mt. Calvary. In February, a library committee was appointed to supervise the purchase of books for the church library. A new amplifying system was installed. On February 28 the Saturday Bible School had a high attendance of 124 children. On April 5, Easter Sunday, 826 people attended services which surpassed all previous records. A Mother-Daughter banquet was held May 8 sponsored by the Women's Guild. On June 11 a Father-Son banquet was

sponsored by the Ladies' Mission Society. The 25th Anniversary also produced new robes for the Senior Choir and new communion ware..

In Mt. Calvary's first twenty-five years of grace under God the following totals have been recorded. A sum of 738 have been baptized, 672 children and 66 adults. 652 have been confirmed, 390 children and 262 adults. A total of 137 couples have been married and 76 members have been buried. At this time Mt. Calvary numbered about 1,000 souls and close to 700 communicants. And over 200 children have enrolled in the school system.

In the next twenty-five years, Mt. Calvary has continued to remain steadfast in His service. In January of 1957, the congregation voted to build the first stage of the present school. This stage included the fellowship hall, two classrooms on the ground floor and two classrooms on the second floor. Ground breaking took place on September 15, 1957 and the building was dedicated on Sunday, August 17 1958.

When Pastor Backer accepted a call to St. Martin's in Winona, Minnesota, in December of 1954, Mt. Calvary called Pastor Lloyd L. Lambert to be their pastor. He was installed on February 20, 1955. Under Pastor Lambert major construction projects were undertaken which produced the second stage of the original church-school project and a new parsonage.

In May of 1961, the congregation decided to move the parsonage from 16th and Park Avenue to 1812 Park Avenue to make way

for the new church and school rooms about to be built. After a successful fund raising drive, the congregation voted on April 23, 1962, that the Building Committee be authorized to proceed with the construction of the church building and additional classrooms..

The final service in the old church was held on Sunday, July 8, 1962. During the construction period, church services were held in the fellowship hall of the school. The cornerstone-laying of the new structure took place on Sunday, November 11, and dedication services were held on Sunday, May 19, 1963. The addition increased the school's capacity to nine classrooms and offered a solution to the bulging enrollment. In 1969 the old parsonage was sold and in 1970 a new parsonage was built on 16th and Denton Streets where it stands today.

In February of 1974, Pastor Lambert accepted a call to Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church of Eugene, Oregon. Mt. Calvary then called Pastor Edward Schaewe to be its next pastor. Pastor Schæewe was installed on June 16, 1974.. Soon the congregation was busy installing new stained glass windows in the church to celebrate their fifty year anniversary..

Mt. Calvary's school and other organizations have continued to thrive. Three principals have faithfully served the school. Mr. Hagedorn served from 1958-1967, Mr. Roger Hinz from 1967-1972, and Mr. LeRoy Robbert from 1973 to the present time.. The 1974 faculty was: Mrs. Carol Kuecker, Mrs. Lois Robbert, Mrs. Pat Wolff, Miss Barb Rach, Miss Mary Brinkman,

Mrs. Janice Raasch, Mr. Roger Wolff, Mr. David Enter and Mr. LeRoy Robbert.

Two organizations which existed as a result of the school were the Christian Education Society and the Mt. Calvary Lutheran School board. The purpose of the Christian Education Society was to provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together for the good of the child's education. The school board served as the controlling body of the school, and had representatives from each of the sister congregations that sent their children to Mt. Calvary's school.

The Saturday School was meeting every Saturday morning from September through May. Its purpose was to provide Christian Education for our young children ages four through confirmation, especially those who were unable to attend the Christian Day School. There were about 35 children attending.

Mt. Calvary has Lutheran Girl Pioneers and Sunbeams. The Sunbeams were for girls in grades 1 and 2. The Girl Pioneers were for girls third grade and older. Its purpose was to train young Christian girls in spiritual growth and Christian fellowship by providing God-pleasing, constructive, and supervised recreation. They studied citizenship, nature, first aid, homemaking, handicraft and etiquette. They were assisted by leaders and a Girl Pioneer Council. Attendance was about 18 girls.

There was also a Lutheran Boy Pioneers, which was an organization for boys in grades 4 through 12. Its purpose was to help lead our youth down the Godly road to adulthood through

Christian fellowship, outdoor living, first aid, and arts and crafts. There were about 15 boys that attend. They too, were assisted by leaders and a Pioneer Council. The Buckaroos were for boys in grades 1 through 3. They had an attendance of 9 boys.

The ladies of the Women's Guild and the Mission Society, because of declining membership, in February 1977 decided to merge into one body and chose the name of Mt. Calvary Ladies' Aid Society. The purpose of this organization was to grow spiritually, assist our congregation and support missionary endeavors, promote Christian education, and practice Christian charity among the sick and needy. The constitution was signed by 57 charter members.

Mt. Calvary's Ladies' Mission Society once had six separate 'Circle' groups underneath it. Only Circle III remained from these six. Circle III was a small group of ladies who served our Lord by giving off their time and talents through various sewing projects for our church and several mission fields. They also made cash contributions for school and church projects as well as various missionary endeavors. In 1974, thirteen ladies were meeting once every month.

Mt. Calvary's talented group of church organists included Elaine Samb, Sue Beutler, Lee Robbert, Janice Raasch, Grace Pengra, Kathy Roraff, Jan Leibl, and Betty Mittelsteadt who was organist already for Mt. Calvary in 1950. They have given greatly of their time and talents. Adult Bible Classes were

still held and the adult choir practiced together once every week.

God has surely showered His grace on Mt. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in La Crosse, Wisconsin these past fifty years. They have grown both in number and in spirit under God's tender loving care. May He continue to bless them richly and keep them in His saving grace.

SOURCES

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- 50 Years of God's Grace (1928 - 1978) Mt. Calvary Ev.  
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- The LaCrosse Tribune --May 19, 1963 and November 19, 1960.

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NOTE OF GRATITUDE

---I would like to thank Pastor Glenn  
Moddenhauer for making Mt. Calvary's  
historical information available to me.