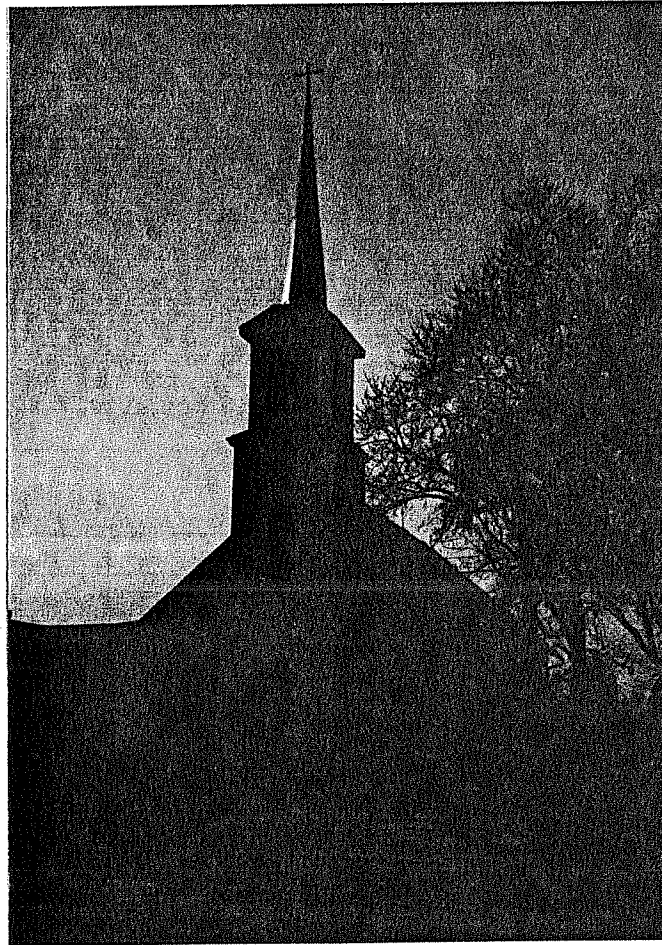


A HISTORY OF IMMANUEL EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH  
LEWISTON, MINNESOTA

by Gregg Warning



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A History of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church  
Lewiston, Minnesota

The organization of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church in Lewiston, Minnesota dates back to the organization of the Missouri Synod itself. Why should such an old Missouri Synod church interest a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student in Mequon? Are Seminary students that hard up for Church History topics? Or does this church hold a special interest to the writer? Fortunately, the latter is more true than the former.

Then what is it about the history of Immanuel congregation that deserves the writer's time and attention? The writer's future mother-in-law has ancestors who were the charter members of this unique congregation.

Although the historical organization of this congregation took place in June, 1862, the background that made this Missouri Synod Lutheran congregation here possible, dates back to the organization of the Missouri Synod itself on April 26, 1847. The charter members of Immanuel had a religious background mostly of Saxony, Germany, who had very much in common with the Saxon fathers who organized the Missouri Synod.

Church History fanatics may wonder what reasons these Saxon fathers had for coming to America. They came to America in 1839 because rationalistic tendencies within the State Church of Saxony had distorted the truth of God's Word and made the exercise of confessional Lutheranism almost impossible.

They were seeking a land which guaranteed religious liberty. The Dresden police no longer permitted the exercise of the full freedom of worship and Ammon's book, "The Development of Christianity Into the World Religion, " which was unchristian and unbiblical, was decreed to be the guide of the Church of Saxony. All of ~~the~~ finally convinced Pastor Stephan and others to emigrate to America in 1839.

These men were not political refugees, jail birds, adventurers, religious fanatics or illiterates. Among these men were preachers, men of theology, farmers, mechanics, tradesmen, civil officers, doctors, educators, and artists. They were a highly cultured people. They carried with them many tools, utensils, and furniture. Pastor Keyl even took with him his grand piano and the natives stood in open-mouthed wonder at the doors and windows of his log cabin listening to the unaccustomed sounds. These Saxon fathers had a deep religious conviction, courage, and almost limitless energy. This is the heritage which founded and organized Immanuel in Lewiston, MN. Almost all of them came from provinces such as Hanover, Mechlenburg, Holstein, Brandenburg, Pomerania, Sillesia, Bavaria, and Saxony.

The charter members of Immanuel came from Wisconsin, Illinios, Michigan, Indiana, and some of them directly from Germany to settle in southeastern Minnesota. Many of them no doubt came during the infancy of Minnesota in its statehood. They found their way to Winona County. The city of Winona,

the oldest city in southern Minnesota, had a population of 2,468 by 1860. The value of the dollar manifested itself in the sale of land for a \$1.00 to a \$1.25 per acre.

In 1862, the year of the organization of this church, a great fire swept away nearly all the business portion of the city of Winona in a night. But their religious zeal would not let them rest until they also took care of their spiritual needs. They erected buildings so that they could provide religious services as well as religious Day School training. The Rev. Henry F.C. Grupe was called to be their pastor and the charter members were A. Fritz, C. Fritz, D. Fritz, J. Fritz, F. Gensmer, N. Luehmann, A. Malzahn, F. Malzahn, W. Malzahn, Matzke Sr., Matzke Jr., E. Mueller, J. Mueller, J. Pagel, W. Rupprecht, W. Tews, A. Viegut, F. Viehstaedt, and F. Wollin. They built a church-school structure 24'x40', located where the present new double garage stands. Immanuel is the ninth oldest Missouri Synod Lutheran congregation in the state of Minnesota.

Under the direction of Dr. C.F.W. Walther and the efforts of Pastor Grupe and the faith and religious convictions of Lutheran families here in this area, Immanuel Lutheran congregation got started. Pastor Grupe served from 1862-1867.

On March 15, 1865 the congregation requested to become a member of the Missouri Synod. The request was taken up at the Synod Convention held in Milwaukee June 14-20, 1865 and it was accepted.

Already after little over three years of existence, the

voters were discussing building a new and larger building to serve as a church. But the new building was not built because a part of the membership branched off in 1866 and founded St. John's Lutheran Church of Lewiston. May 12, 1867 Pastor Grupe accepted a call to Decatur, Illinois. Pastor Theo. Krumsieg accepted the call and arrived on January 16, 1868.

On Oct. 7, 1868 due to crowded conditions an addition of 12 feet was added. On May 20, 1873 Pastor Krusieg accepted a call to Henderson, Minnesota. Pastor G.P. A. Schaaf of Baltimore, M.D. accepted the call and arrived on December 5, 1873.

During Pastor Schaaf's ministry of nearly 5 years at Immanuel the groundwork for a full time, trained Christian Day School teacher and a new church building was laid. A teacher was called and an addition of 14'x22' was built on to serve as the teacher's living quarters. Considerable discussion was given about building a new church and its location. Pastor Schaaf drew up some plans for a church 36'x60' with tower, chancel, and vestry. Although there had been considerable planning and discussion on the project of building a new church, the existing conditions and circumstances were of such a nature that definite steps towards building could not be successfully taken. During the year 1878, a number of families branched off to organize Holy Trinity congregation in Norton Township. On October 3, 1878 Pastor Schaaf took a call and Pastor Kothe accepted the call to replace him and he was installed on Sunday, after New Year, 1879.

Pastor Kothe's pastorate of a little more than four years marks the beginning of building operations. Both a new church, which is the present church today, and a parsonage were built. On Jan. 22, 1879 a resolution was adopted to build a new church with the following description: frame, 56'x 34', with vestry, and a tower 75' to contain a bell of 1600lbs. The cost was estimated at about \$2,200.

It was resolved on Feb. 5, 1881 to build a new parsonage, 34'x22', with a porch on the south side at a cost of \$675. This new parsonage was the second parsonage provided by the congregation and stood about in the middle of the present parsonage lawn, where the cistern is located. Pastor Kothe accepted a call on February 23, 1883 to Mayville, Wisconsin. Pastor J.J. Bernthal was called and he accepted and arrived in May of 1883.

Pastor Bernthal led the congregation to build a new school. The building was 28'x50' and was built for \$400. It was razed on February, 1951. At this time we read of enrollments of 69 to 80 children. On June 26, 1887 Pastor Bernthal accepted a call to Wyandotte, Michigan. Pastor Pfotenhauer was called and was installed on December 4, 1887.

Pastor Pfotenhauer was an excellent spiritual advisor and leader, who was not only aware of the needs of the congregation at home, but also sought to make the congregation conscious and well informed about Synod.

On October 27, 1889 authorization was given to place a

sign of identification on the church with the wording: "Ev. Lutherische Immanuels Germeinde U.A.C. Town Utica, Winona County, Minn." By Feb., 1890 there was a voting list of 72 members and it was decided that Bible Hour for the entire congregation should be held during the winter months.

It was at about this time that the name of "Silo" came into existence. A postal sub-station was set up right south of the church property. The name "Silo" was given to it. The name may have been taken from Joshua 18:1, "Und as versammelte sich die ganze gemeine der Kinder Israel gen Silo, und richeten daselbst auf die Huette des Stifts, und das Land war ihnen unterworten." So the name "Silo" appeared on the maps, and Immanuel church became closely associated with it in being frequently called "Silo Lutheran Church," or "the church at Silo." The post office of Silo was discontinued but the name Silo still remains an integral part of the congregation's identification.

On Sept. 4, 1892, it was decided to add a new kitchen and porches to the east and west of the parsonage. On Sept. 2, 1894 Pastor Pfotenhauer accepted a call to Hamburg, Minnesota. Pastor A.H. Kuntz was extended a call which he accepted. The communicant membership at this time stood at 258.

The ministry of Pastor Kuntz of eleven and a half years marks many local improvements and changes, as well as the building of the teacherage. On Nov. 16, 1903 it was finally decided to build a new teacherage at a cost of about \$1,400. On April 22, 1906 Pastor Kuntz accepted a call to a congregation in St. Paul, Minnesota. On May 6, 1906, it was resolved to send

the Call to Pastor W.F. Hitzemann who accepted. However, after a little more than eight months, when after a short illness due to Bright's disease, death came and took this laborer of the Lord.

After a short vacancy Pastor Robert Gaiser of Elmore, Minn. was finally called and he accepted. During the ministry of Pastor Gaiser the Young People's Society was organized. Plans for a new parsonage were presented on Feb. 20, 1911 which provided a house with the dimensions 32'x38'. Its costs came to \$2,209.80.

The congregation joyously observed their 50th Anniversary on Sunday, June 30, 1912. The newspaper editorials describing the occasion refer particularly to the spirit of joy and praise. Pastor Grupe served as guest speaker in the morning basing his sermon on the text from Psalm 100.

An important issue was decided on Feb.17, 1919. There was a resolution to have an English Service once a month. The pastorate of Rev. Gaiser terminated with his resignation on August 15, 1920. The Call was sent to Pastor J. Hafner, Ormsby, Minnesota, who accepted and was installed the 21st Sunday after Trinity, October 24, 1920.

The pastorate of Rev. Hafner, of a little more than twenty-five and a half years, represents the longest time of all Immanuel's pastors. The membership statistics at the time of Pastor Hafner's arrival in 1920 was as follows: baptized souls, 300; communicants, 192; voters, 55; children in the Day School, 42.



Some of the more significant events are as follows:

- May 24, 1925- telephones installed in the parsonage and teacherage
- Nov. 22, 1926- decided to excavate under the school and make the basement, which was unfinished, larger
- Dec. 4, 1927- decided to partition off the rear of church to provide a mother's room
- July 12, 1931- confirmation instructions were also in the English language
- April 18, 1937- decided to purchase new church benches at a cost of \$549.15, and chairs to match for \$36.30.
- Jan. 11, 1938- decided to have the church property wired for electricity
- Oct. 22, 1939- decided to install an electric motor and blower for the pipe organ, which until now was pumped by hand
- Mar. 7, 1943- resolved to purchase 100 hymnals, the new edition
- Jan. 24, 1944- decided to remove the old barns and build new buildings for the pastor and teacher. These are the buildings now in use for storage. Also decided to build a double garage 22'x22' of cinder blocks.

After Pastor Hafner had observed his fiftieth anniversary in the ministry he retired on July 7, 1946. Pastor John J.C. Brehm was called and served from 1946-1947. While

While he was pastor it was resolved to have all the Minutes of the congregation written in the English language. It was also resolved to have all English services with the exception of one Sunday in the month when a combination service of English and German was to take place. On Oct. 19, 1947 Pastor Brehm accepted the Call to Reed City, Michigan.

Pastor Emil Geistfeld accepted the Call and was installed on Dec. 7, 1947. The final plan for a new school was adopted

on July 1, 1948. The ground breaking service was held on April 20, 1949. By July 5, 1949, in its meeting the congregation resolved to discontinue all German at their services. On Mar. 5, 1951 they decided to build the double garage on the old school foundation with the dimensions 28'x24' to be in line with the teacherage.

At this time the congregation was blessed with a good stewardship record. The entire school building project of close to \$67,000.00 was liquidated in four years. From 1948-1951 a per family average of \$401.72 per year was contributed. The average church attendance per baptized souls was 179. Communion attendance averaged 4.24 times per communicant per year.

During the first half of the past decade the congregation was under the leadership of Pastor Emil Geistfeld. The school had been built in 1949 and the enrollments were on the increase again. In September of 1952 the second classroom was discussed. And in the fall of 1953 a second teacher was called. During the years of Pastor Geistfeld a considerable amount of work on the grounds was also accomplished.

The congregations next servant of the Lord was Pastor Harold Braun who was called from Rolla, North Dakota. He was installed on February 6, 1955. The present organ was purchased in 1956. On January 21, 1958 a third teacher was called. Pastor Braun left on Nov. 28, 1961 and Pastor Witte was called from Trinity at Bellingham who took his place.

The congregation celebrated their centennial with a service on July 22, 1962. The theme of the centennial celebration

was "Abounding in the Work of the Lord."

On February of 1962 Pastor Clarence Witte was installed. The church built in 1879, was redecorated as it had been in 1935. This project included a lowered chancel, ceiling, new chancel furnishings, new floor tile, a church basement, and carpeting throughout the front of the church. Pastor Witte was given permission to wear a cassock and surplice. At the end of 1962 the baptized membership was 315 and the communicant membership was 193. The budget for the year was \$24,200. In May of 1966 Pastor Witte accepted a Call to Vesper and Sigul Wisconsin. Seminary graduate Merle Kitzmann was installed and ordained on September 11. Beginning in July of 1968 the Old Testament lessons were proclaimed in church in addition to the Epistle and Gospel Lessons. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible was now used instead of the King James Version.

An evangelism committee was organized. The mention of the committee shows how the congregation truly was interested in carrying out the Lord's work near and far. The issue of altar and pulpit fellowship were locally discussed in the congregation. Twenty copies of the Worship Supplement were purchased for study. Stained glass windows around the theme, "Immanuel" were planned. Congregational minutes indicated a financial difficulty in 1971.

The minutes of 1972 make mention of the brewing controversy at the St. Louis Seminary. The congregation participated in a Synod-wide evangelistic thrust in connection with

the Synod's 125th anniversary in 1973. It was known as Key 73.

In July of 1973 Pastor Kitzmann accepted a call to Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Pastor Larson was called and took his place on Feb. 10, 1974. Building plans for a gymnasium/auditorium were discussed.

In 1975 a motion to grant women the right to vote failed by a decided margin. A straw ballot to build a gymnasium, 50'x 90' to seat 350 people, passed by a 28 to 24 vote. Gymnasium plans proceeded in 1976 with expences of \$106,371 and a loan of over \$90,000. The gymnasium was dedicated on September 1976. At the end of 1976 there were 353 baptized members and 246 communicants.

In January, 1977 Pastor Larson accepted a call to St. John's in Granite Oklahoma. The congregation went three and a half years without a pastor. Pastor Luedtke of Plainview and Pastor Lieder of Winona served the pastoral vacancy. However, the all-wise Lord of the Church did see fit to bring a measure of growth during the lengthy pastoral vacancy.

The dual parish with Grace Lutheran in Stockton was dissolved in 1978. This was the end of a relationship that lasted over 87 years.

Parsonage repairs occupied the attention of trustees. The minutes noted wide discussion of insurance coverages. Steeple repairs and reconstruction was again necessary.

In 1979 Pastor Lieder offered these words of encouragement in the annual report to this troubled congregation:

"It is now three years that Immanuel congregation has been without a resident pastor. But there is no reason for disappointments to lead to a spirit of defeatism or despair. Let us instead find here a challenge to go forward with the assurance that the Lord of Church is not only with us to continue to bless us, but that in His own time He will provide the pastor that is needed, in accordance with His own supreme wisdom and mercy, His thoughts and ways being far higher than ours." At the end of 1979, baptized membership stood at 354 and communicant membership at 253.

Finally on July 13, 1980 the congregation installed Larry Griffin to be their pastor, who was a seminary graduate of Fort Wayne Seminary. In 1980 Constitutional revision saw the formation of a formal evangelism committee, as well as stewardship and budget committees. Midweek evening Bible classes began. For the first time in the history of the congregation two worship services were held each week at the end of 1981. At the end of 1982 there were 452 baptized members and 302 communicant members. Forty-seven young people were enrolled in the parochial school, and the Sunday School continued to grow. A breakfast Bible Study Group was formed and met the first Saturday of each month. A Caring Fund was organized as part of the Dorcas Circle. The Lydia Circle was formed as the Altar Guild, <sup>the</sup> Martha Circle for prayer and study, and the Mary Circle for Bible Study and service.

In 1984 the school saw the addition of three computers, a new copy machine and a new ditto machine. The pews in the church were completely padded.

Assimilation of new members received much attention in 1985. The Lutheran Worship introductory booklets were introduced and used about half the time, with mixed feelings. Small group ministries and "caring and keeping" ministries were highlighted in goal setting sessions.

A young adults group was formed, and a Sunday morning women's Bible study was organized.

In 1987 the congregation celebrated their 125th anniversary.

Today, Immanuel is still a growing and stable congregation. Stewardship record remains strong, and the evangelism efforts are ambitious and have been richly blessed by God. Current membership stands at 490 souls and 340 communicants.

God has richly blessed this congregation, in spite of the fact that it is a member of a heterodox church body. Although I can not be in fellowship with this church body I pray that God will continue to work through the Word that <sup>is</sup> taught and preached in this congregation.