



A History of the Vicar Program at St. Peter  
Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church.

Church History  
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Over the years, the Vicar Program has proven to be a very valuable asset to the work of our Synod. Many congregations and future pastors have benefited from this program. In the earliest stages of the program, congregations would ask the seminary to provide them with a student who would assist their pastor in the work of the church. This was often done on a part time basis. This vicar would conduct his work on weekends or during the summer. It wasn't long before the seminary realized how helpful this was in training men for full time work in God's Kingdom. It seemed that these men who volunteered to vicar were more prepared to serve in the pastoral ministry. This resulted in the obligatory vicar year, first implemented in 1965. From 1965 on every man attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was required to serve full time at a church as his third year of schooling.

The purpose of this paper is not to recount the history of the Vicar Program as a whole. This paper will focus on two churches in particular that has served the Vicar Program in a very large way. St. Peter Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church of Savanna and Mt. Carroll Illinois have participated in the Vicar Program since 1962. In this paper I will give a bit of a history of the Vicar program. I will look at the various duties a vicar is involved in during his time at St. Peter and Trinity. We will examine Pastor Wayne Schneider and his role as the supervising pastor for 29 vicars since 1974. I will relate some personal stories past vicars have shared with me.

Since 1962 37 vicars have served the dual parish of Trinity/St.Peter. 3 of these vicars served in the years when vicars were voluntarily. The other 34 served as a required part of their preparation for the full time ministry. St.Peter/Trinity's first three vicars served only on a part time and voluntary basis. Pastor Ron Roth describes the difficulties of volunteer vicaring, "I vicared at Savanna-Mt. Carroll during the 1962-63 school year. I served two weekends a

month, traveling to Mt. Carroll on Friday evenings, conducting confirmation class and visitations on Saturday. I preached at Mt. Carroll and Savanna on Sunday mornings, conducting service at Mosquito Hill Sunday afternoon and returning to the Seminary.”<sup>1</sup> This was a very heavy load for these vicars to take on. Besides their vicar duties, these men also attended the Seminary full time.

St. Peter/Trinity’s first 8 vicars served under the supervision of Pastor Ted Mahnke who served the two churches from 1961 –1970. The vicars who served under Pastor Mahnke recall his veteran leadership and speak highly of their informal chats with him about different areas of the pastoral ministry and his exceptionally personal approach to the ministry.

After Pastor Mahnke death in 1970 St. Peter and Trinity called Pastor Wayne Schneider who was serving at St. Peter Lutheran church in Broadhead WI. Pastor Schneider accepted his call and began serving the Trinity/St. Peter Parish in January of 1971. Pastor Schneider would spend the first 3 years of his ministry in Savanna and Mt. Carroll without a vicar. This was a great change for the parish because they had gone the previous eight years with a vicar, both full and part-time. This would soon change. In 1974 Trinity and St. Peter called Richard Agenten to serve as their vicar for the 1974-75 school year. Pastor Agenten would be the first vicar to serve under Pastor Schneider. He would certainly not be the last.<sup>2</sup>

When a congregation desires to call a vicar, the church is required to write a letter to the president of its district detailing the reasons why they are requesting a vicar. Every year Pastor Schneider writes a letter to the president of the Western Wisconsin District and lists the reasons why St. Peter/Trinity is a profitable place for a vicar to serve. Pastor Schneider lists 5 reasons saying:

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is taken from an interview of many of the former vicars of Trinity/St.Peter via e-mail.

<sup>2</sup> From the history of St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church by : Eunice Wehde.

1. We have tried to provide the vicars with a good learning experience in each of the congregations, one in a small town setting and the other in a rural area. We have many opportunities for the young man to grow and experience first hand as he teaches Bible classes, makes calls and leads the youth group activities. We also have the challenge of the Jesus cares and ministry and the possibility of some prison ministry.
2. The parsonage in Mt. Carroll for the vicar (and his wife) to live in. It also teaches him how to take care of a parsonage.
3. The pastor has the experience of supervising many vicars in the past and is willing to take the time to guide them in all aspects of the parish ministry.
4. Our two congregations remain convinced that the present arrangement of vicar and pastor working together is the most suitable way to serve the manpower needs of the parish. The two congregations have a combined membership of 324 souls.
5. Being part of the synod's vicar program for these many years has made the two churches deeply aware of the need to support the worker-training and mission outreach of the synod.<sup>3</sup>

From 1974 until the present, 2004, Pastor Schneider has participated in the training of 29 men for the pastoral ministry, serving in the role of supervising pastor. This is a role that he has taken very seriously. I witnessed first hand Pastor Schneider's skill in handling a new vicar each year. It is clear that he understands his role as a supervising pastor and where a vicar is at in his ability to effectively serve a congregation. In the book, "The Shepherd Under Christ," the role of the vicar and supervising pastor is described as such:

The vicar is not an assistant pastor who as a graduate has completed his seminary course and is now called by a congregation to share in the performance of the pastoral work in its midst. The vicar is a student who is still in training, and the solemn responsibility of providing that training devolves upon the supervising pastor. The vicar is not on his own, but is to be guided and instructed. The supervising pastor will assign the vicar's work, hold him responsible for carrying out his assignments punctually, and encourage, rebuke, admonish, as the circumstances require. All of this he will do in the spirit of Christian

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<sup>3</sup> From a letter written by Pastor Schneider requesting a vicar.

love with the understanding that he is to look for progress, not perfection.<sup>4</sup>

With these principles in mind Pastor Schneider works with his vicars each year to help them grow in their passion for the ministry and in their ability to serve. Many of Pastor Schneider's former vicars have shared that one of the most beneficial parts of working with Pastor Schneider was his approach to the vicars. Pastor Bill Favorite remembers, "I felt that the training I received training and guidance mostly through his insights and advice that came up in informal conversations. I appreciated his low key approach yet always upbeat and supportive style."<sup>5</sup> Pastor Schneider makes an extra effort to spend quality time speaking with his vicar about the various aspects of the parish ministry. These conversations usually would come in informal settings. I remember a few conversations during Green Bay Packer Monday Night Football games. We would talk about different things going on in the church, and the different ways of taking care of problem. Former vicar Pastor Mark Jacobson remembers the most famous location of these informal talks:

One of the most beneficial things about working under Pastor Schneider was how comfortable I became in bringing any difficulties I was having to him in regular conversation. We would go to lunch together 2 or 3 times a week. During lunch we would talk casually about whatever was my mind or his. I learned a great deal from him during those lunch conversations and appreciated his laid-back approach.<sup>6</sup>

This sentiment was shared by many of the other vicars who were interviewed.

Now that we have looked at the pastor who has supervised 29 vicars, we will now look at the various aspects of the ministry, which the vicar is involved in at St. Peter and Trinity. After their installation, vicars are invited to a parish picnic. At this picnic, the new vicar is

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<sup>4</sup> Schuetze/Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 378 NPH; Milwaukee 1989

<sup>5</sup> Vicar interview

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

given his first opportunity to get to know the members of both churches. He plays games with the children and has the chance to chat with many of the veteran members. Historically, after his installation, this picnic has marked the beginning of the vicar year in Savanna and Mt. Carroll.

Throughout his vicar year, the St. Peter/Trinity vicar is involved in many of the same activities as other vicars. He has to preach once a month in the beginning and twice a month as the year goes on. The vicar attends all of the various meetings. He shares all the various calls with the pastor and shares teaching various Bible classes.

There are a few aspects of the ministry at Trinity/St. Peter where the vicar takes the leading role. The vicar has almost always led the Youth Group, which was organized in 1959. The vicar is in charge of organizing outings, and leading Bible classes. One of the most challenging parts of leading the Youth Group is raising money for the various outings. Many vicars find this part of the vicar program one of the most rewarding and enjoyable parts of their stay in Mt. Carroll and Savanna.

In the 1980's a Jesus Cares program was started at the Gordon Jones Home in the nearby town of Lanark. Each year the vicar sets up a time to go to the Gordon Jones home once a month and conduct a worship service with the residents there. Since its inception, this program has grown considerably. It has grown from a simple Bible class to worship service with instruments and worship folders. The vicar also brings along the Youth Group once a year for a service project. The Youth Group works with the mentally handicapped residents planting flowers and engaging in a bit of conversation.

Another unique ministry opportunity in Savanna and Mt. Carroll is its radio ministry. Radio broadcasts of Sunday services began in 1971 shortly after Pastor Schneider arrived. This ministry does not stop though with Sunday services. Every Thursday either the pastor or the vicar goes to WCCI in Savanna and records a five-minute devotion that airs shortly before noon on Thursdays. These weekly trips to the radio station allow the vicar to make contacts with some of the residents of Savanna. These contacts prove beneficial as the year goes on.

Every vicar under Pastor Schneider has lived in the same home. When Pastor Mahnke died in 1970 the parsonage next to Trinity in Mt. Carroll was left vacant. But in 1974 this parsonage would become the home of every vicar from 1974 until the present. While the parsonage is a bit old, it has been a very nice home for the vicars to live in. Many vicars leaving the Seminary have lived in either a small dorm room or a small apartment. When they arrive in Mt. Carroll the members of the parish are waiting there ready to move the vicar into his new and mostly likely, much larger home. They live in this home free of charge. On their part the vicars are in charge of keeping up the grounds of the parsonage and church. Since 2001, the vicars have also been in charge of cleaning the inside of the church building as well. A few vicars have also taken it upon themselves to make needed repairs to the parsonage. They have painted, repaired windows, installed sinks and made many other minor repairs. Some vicars have commented that the location of the church and parsonage is not ideal because it is located in the middle of 4 different farm fields with the nearest town being 4 miles away. <sup>7</sup> In spite of its location, it remains an enjoyable place to live.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview of vicars

When asked to share some humorous stories from their vicar year, one thing seemed to bring many of the stories together. A number of vicars shared funny stories that involved driving. Many vicars were pulled over for speeding while others hit a few deer. A few of them were even pulled over for speeding while traveling from one church to another to preach.<sup>8</sup>

37 vicars is a pretty amazing thing. It has taken dedication on the part of 2 supervising pastor and a great commitment on the part of the members of both churches. They treat their vicars well and are always concerned about their needs. The dual parish of Trinity and St. Peter has proven to be a productive and enjoyable place for vicars to train for full-time service in the Lord's Kingdom.

As retirement draws near for Pastor Wayne Schneider, it remains to be seen what the future of the vicar program is for this dual parish. While no one knows the future, the history of the vicar program at St. Peter and Trinity is clear and remarkable. These two churches have contributed in large way to the training of many men for the pastoral ministry. Men who trained at these two churches are now involved in many different types of ministry. Gerald Plitzuwiet who served from 1962-63 spent much of his ministry in ministerial education at both Northwestern College and then at Martin Luther College. Charles Flunker (64-64) has been a missionary for many years and is currently serving in Brazil. Robert Fleischmann (81-82) serves in the administration at Christian Life Resources. John Hartmann (84-85) is a missionary in Zambia Africa. Many others serve in various locations across the United States. It is clear that the two congregations of Trinity and St. Peter have served God's Church well in the training of young men for full time work in the church.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid



## A list of all of the vicars and the years they served

<p><b><u>Under Pastor Mahnke</u></b></p> <p>Gerald Plitzuwiet 62-63</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ronald Roth 63-64</p> <p>Charles Flunker 64-65</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Douglas Bode 65-66</p> <p>Alfred Jannusch 66-67</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Leroy Martin 67-68</p> <p>Jon Schmuggee 68-69</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ralph Stuebs 69-70</p> <p><b><u>Under Pastor Schneider</u></b></p> <p>Richard Agenten 74-75</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Michael Frick 75-76</p> <p>Gerald Blobaum 77-78</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Jay Gottschalk 78-79</p> <p>Thomas Horner 79-80</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">John S. Dorn 80-81</p> <p>Robert Fleischmann 81-82</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Shawn Kauffeld 82-83</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">Donald Main 83-84</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">John Hartmann 84-85</p>	<p><b>Pastor Schneider cont.</b></p> <p>William Favorite 85-86</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Kevin Hanke 86-87</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">David Haugly 87-88</p> <p>Kurt Uhlenbrauch 88-89</p> <p>David Wierschke 89-90</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Robert Seifert 90-91</p> <p>Dennis Reichow 91-92</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">John Moll 92-93</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Kurt Talsma 93-94</p> <p>Christopher Goelzer 94-95</p> <p>Robbin Robbert 95-96</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">William Finn 96-97</p> <p>Todd Krueger 97-98</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">John Werner 98-99</p> <p>Joe Crabtree 2000-01</p> <p>James Heffner 01-02</p> <p>Mark Jacobson 02-03</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Clint Burow 03-04</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Adam Manian 04-05</p>
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