

St. John Lutheran Church

A Great Beginning...

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ellinwood was organized on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1877, as the "Evangelisch-Lutherischen St. Johannes Gemeinde zu Ellinwood." Rev. Phillip Hoezel, the first pastor, was chairman of the meeting. He also served as pastor of the church at Great Bend. It was decided that Pastor Hoezel should live in or near Ellinwood, and that he would conduct services in the district No. 2 schoolhouse until a church could be built.

Casper Schrepel, Carl Hammer, and Dietrich Bosse were elected the first elders of the new church. Those signing the constitution were J.H.D. Bosse, Herman Bosse, Heinrich Brewer, Charles Buenger, Carl Hammer, F. Hammer, Fritz Hauser, Herman Hoeme, Julius Hoeme, Heinrich Koenig, Herman Koenig, Frank Neickels, Henry Panning, Casper Schrepel, and John Schrepel. Later, Friedrich Kleile, John Knop, and Ernest Isern also signed.

Later that month, on April 22, the congregation held a meeting and decided to unite with the sister congregation at Great Bend, then called "Emanuelsgemeinde" or Emanuel Church. At another meeting, on May 13, it was decided to send the three elders to Great Bend to effect the union. Whether such a union was ever effected is not indicated.

Getting Down To Business

A year and a half after the church's founding, the congregation decided to build a church. Casper Schrepel, Henry Panning, and Dietrich Bosse were elected to the Building Committee in a meeting on December 1, 1878, and were given not only the responsibility to build the church, but that of procuring the funds. A month later, on January 1, 1879, the committee announced that a 100 x 140 foot building site had been purchased from the Santa Fe Railroad for \$1.00.

Three days later, on January 4, the congregation had a thorough discussion of the new church and there developed

Topeka, but the German version remained official until 1930.

A few miscellaneous notes from this early period are worth mentioning briefly.

Rather than form an annual budget, for many years the congregation simply appointed collectors to raise funds as they were needed. For instance, when money to pay the pastor ran short, the collectors fanned out through the congregation to take a collection. Offerings from certain Sundays would be designated for certain purposes. In 1888 a Sunday collection was earmarked to reimburse Pastor Krause for coal that he had purchased. This method for paying much of the church's expenses remained the same into the late 1950's. In 1937, for instance, the church had sets of "collectors" for the pastor's salary, for building and operating expenses, and for the synodical budget.

From the beginning the church was mission-minded. Perhaps as a result of the early years when the local congregation was itself a "mission" for eastern churches, which helped to reduce St. John's debt. For instance, the first "Mission Festival" was held in the fall of 1887. In the year 1893 festival day offerings went to help the poor. In 1881 a Sunday collection went to the church at New Ulm, Minnesota.

Agriculture seemed to play an important role in the church at times. Early minutes reflect a number of meetings which had to be rescheduled because "most of the members are in the harvest fields."

Growth and Change

Pastor Krause requested release in April, 1884. The congregation decided at this time to enlarge the parsonage before calling another pastor.

Obtaining another pastor in a "frontier" congregation involved a considerable period of time. In this particular case, as in others, a "circuit rider" was called to serve the church for the year or two that they might have to wait. This meant that services would be held only once a month or less.

It seems that there was an energy crisis at that time also. In a meeting on January 1, 1883, the congregation decided that religious instruction would have to wait because of the high cost of coal.

In 1892 the church built its first school. The structure was 20 x 28 feet. Classes began in September of that year. On January 5, 1895, it was resolved that children should attend Bible Class after Sunday services until the age of 17. The first Sunday School was organized on July 5, 1900. The Vacation Bible School has been an effective teaching agency for many years.

A Turn Toward the Future

By the turn of the century the church facility was proving inadequate. On September 9, 1900, the congregation determined to build a new church. John Koch, Ernest Isern, and August Schrepel were elected to the Building Committee. The new frame structure was 32 x 58 feet, and was located on the present site of the Ellinwood High School Vocation Agriculture Building, north of the High School. The minutes do not indicate when it was completed and dedicated, nor the cost, but the next reference to it is in April, 1901, when the bills were paid and the committee excused with thanks.

This church was eventually razed. However, the bell was removed from the tower and is mounted at the front of the present Youth Center. A new parsonage on East Third, adjacent to the church, was built in 1902.

Some miscellaneous notes following the turn of the century find, in 1913, the school being repaired and enlarged