

A Summary Of Saint John Lutheran Church History

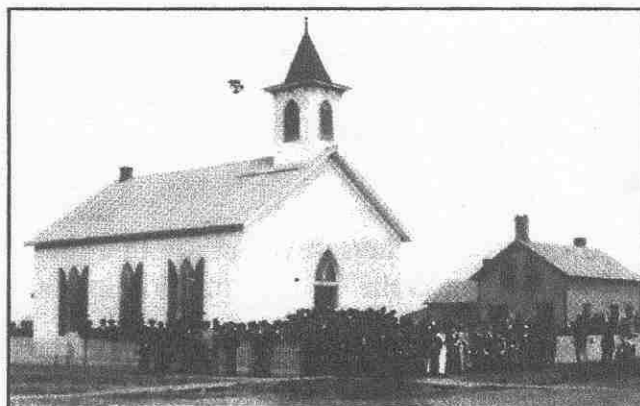
St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ellinwood was organized on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1877, as the Evangelisch-Lutherischen St. Johannes Gemeinde zu Ellinwood. Rev. Philip Hoelzel was the first pastor and also served the Great Bend church. Pastor Hoelzel was to live in or near Ellinwood and conduct 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. 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.

On April 22, the congregation held a meeting and decided to unite with the Great Bend sister congregation called "Emanuelsgemeinde" (Emanuel Church). At a May 13 meeting, it was decided to send three elders to Great Bend to effect the union, but it is not known if such a union was ever effected.

On September 16, 1877, the congregation decided to affiliate with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

A year and a half after the church's founding, the congregation decided to build a church. On Dec. 1, 1878, Casper Schrepel, Henry Panning, and Dietrich Bosse were elected to the Building Committee with the responsibility to build the church, and to come up with the money. A month later, the committee announced a 100' x 140' building site had been purchased from the Santa Fe Railroad for \$1.00.



On January 4, the congregation developed some grandiose plans for the new church to be of gothic style with arched ceilings, and have a brick exterior and tower. However, when it was determined that the proposed church would cost at least \$1,200, the committee set their feet on more practical ground and reported a frame church would cost about \$600. With the congregation agreeing this might be the best approach, on May 14, 1879, they decided to proceed with construction.

Construction began in September 1879. After less than two months of construction, it was dedicated on October 19. Conrad Schrepel, general contractor, charged \$150 for labor. Lumber was \$751. Of that amount \$160 was paid in cash and the remainder covered by a \$591 mortgage to the Ashton Lumber company for 9 months at 12% interest.

On December 31, 1879, a decision was made to build a 14' x 28' parsonage and construction started January 2, 1880. The parsonage was built with free labor and finished in two weeks for a total cost of \$198.61.

Pastor Hoelzel left sometime prior to 1879. Pastor Krause appears in the church minutes of August 10, 1879.

On November 9, 1879, it was decided that Pastor Krause was to give the children religious instruction in both English and German. Classes were held in the church with the elders buying necessities for the school such as coal, a blackboard, a water bucket, etc.

In 1924, St. John's decided to have English services on Sunday evenings and three German and three English communions a year. The minutes of church meetings were recorded in both English and German. By 1930, English became the official language for conducting church business and the church constitution was officially changed to English. In 1941, English services began on Sunday mornings and German services were limited to twice a month. Finally in 1944, all German services were dispensed.

Painting of the exterior of the first church waited until 1881, when Pastor Krause was sent to Great Bend to determine if paint and oil could be purchased cheaper there. The painting was done by the members and later that year the left-over paint was used to paint the interior of the structure.

For many years, rather than form an annual budget, the congregation appointed collectors to raise funds as needed. When money to pay the pastor ran short, the collectors fanned out through the congregation to take a collection. Offerings from certain Sundays were designated for certain purposes. One Sunday's collection was designated to reimburse Pastor Krause for coal he had purchased. This method of paying much of the church's expenses remained into the late 1950's.

From the beginning, the church has been mission minded (perhaps as a result of early years when it was a "mission" for eastern churches which helped reduce St. John's debt) and held its first Mission festival in the fall of 1887. In 1893, festival day offerings went to the poor and in 1881 a Sunday offering went to the church at New Ulm, Minnesota, which had lost everything in a tornado.

Upon Pastor Krause's request for a release in April 1884, a "circuit rider" was called to serve the church during the vacancy. Obtaining a pastor for a "frontier" congregation involved possibly a year or two, which meant services would be held only once a month or less.

Due to an energy crisis, on January 1, 1883, the congregation decided religious instruction would be discontinued for two months because of the high cost of coal.

In 1892, the church built its first school—a 20' x 28' structure—and classes began in September of that year. On January 5, 1895, it was resolved children attend Bible class after Sunday services until the age of 17. The first Sunday school was organized on July 5, 1900.

On September 9, 1900, the congregation resolved to build a new church with John Koch, Ernest Isern, and August Schrepel elected to the Building Committee. The new 32' x 58' frame structure was located on East Third Street where the Ellinwood Vocational Agriculture Building now stands. A new parsonage was built adjacent to the church in 1902.

In 1913, the school was repaired and enlarged to make room for more children. In 1918, two dozen English hymn books were purchased for visitors (each member was to buy his own).

By World War II, the church was again feeling the crunch for space. In August, 1944, it was resolved to build a new church and a Building Fund was started. But in June, 1945, the congregation decided to stay in the same location. That was rescinded in August, 1948, when the "Panning Block" on West Fifth Street was accepted as a site and was a gift from Mr. and Mrs. William Panning.



By October of 1945, \$25,000 had been gathered for the project, and Shaver and Shaver of Salina were hired as architects. In September, 1946, the congregation resolved to gather an additional \$30,000 by February 1, 1948. But in January, 1947, a ceiling of \$80,000 was set. This was rescinded in August, 1948 meeting with the earlier site decision. The new price ceiling was set at \$160,000 and the Building Committee was given the go-ahead for construction with ground-breaking held on Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 1950.

Construction of the present church building consumed nearly two years with total cost amounting to \$255,683. Dedication was held March 2-9, 1952, and the first prayer spoken in the new church was a prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Rujan, who had been blessed with a baby boy, Kurt.

The church debt was paid off in 11 years, and a note-burning ceremony was held Sunday, December 15, 1963. The present parsonage was completed in 1954 and dedicated on May 2.

Construction of the Youth Center, located north of the church, was begun in 1970 and dedicated August 30 of that year. Total cost of this project was \$70,993. The bell from the tower of the previous church on East Third Street is mounted at the front of the building.

For the past 37 years, the program "The Word" has been aired over radio station KVGB. During the 15-minute segment, St. John's pastor-in-residence proclaims the message of the Gospel to a large radio audience.

The Evangelical Lutheran Emmanuel Church *(Rice County Church)*

Pastor Herring of St. John Lutheran Church in Ellinwood helped the church to organize. They adopted a constitution on July 7, 1889. There were twelve charter members.

On October 15, 1892, land was offered by Rieke Gossman for a church site. The church was 26' x 36' and 12' high. Members from the north were to haul stones and members from the south were to transport the rest of the material. The church was dedicated on January 29, 1893. Reverend Brauer of Ellinwood preached at the dedication. The congregation joined the Missouri Synod on August 8, 1997.

A parsonage was erected in 1907 for a cost of \$1,336.44. In July of 1907 a barn was built. Fruit trees and shade trees were planted. Reverend Ruff became the first resident pastor. His yearly salary was \$400 and 100 bushels of grain and 5 to 10 loads of hay.

In 1938 the church was raised and a basement was built under it. There was a question of which language to use, German or English? The men sat on one side of the church, and women and children on the other.

The congregation disbanded in 1948. The parsonage was auctioned off. In the fall of 1949 the church building was moved to Council Grove, Kansas where it is still used today. The church cemetery was assigned to St. John Lutheran Church in Ellinwood. In October of 1989 a new fence with a brick entry was completed.

Pastors Who Served Us Since 1877

Ph. Hoelzel	1877-1878
H. Hengist	1878-1879
H. Krause	1879-1884
A. Ehlers	1884-1885
Aug. Herring	1885-1891
R. Hellwege	1891-1891
L. Brauer	1891-1907
J. Ruff	1907-1912
Theo. Meyer	1912-1236
Fred Kramer	1936-1947
Arthur Traugott	1947-1961
George Bruening	1961-1962
Victor Dahlke	1962-1983
W. Goetzke	1983-1990
R. Bode	1991-1992
J. A. Keltner	1992-present

Other Servants

Gretchen Shults, Deaconess	1961-1963
Gary Norton, Director of Christian Education	1963-1966
Ken Schkade, Director of Christian Education	1967-1973
Wilfred Pieper, Director of Christian Education	1973-1977
David Dittmar, Director of Christian Education	1977-1980
Elaine Whiteneck, Director of Christian Education	1982-1999
Chuck Merriman, DCE Intern	2002-present

The Evangelical Lutheran Emmanuel Church (1889-1948)

A. Herring	1889-1891
R. Hellwege	1891-1891
L. Brauer	1891-1907
W. Ruff	1907-1920
C. Predoehl	1922-1927
P. Juergensen	1928-1941
R. Juengel	1941-1944
H. M. Hansen	1945-1946

* Pastors from Ellinwood and Holyrood filled in during vacancies.