

(A brief review of the history of the First Luth. Church of Wittenberg, Wisconsin. Written for the 50th anniversary, June 11th, 1932.)

The first church service held by Norwegian Lutheran church people in Wittenberg, was held on the 29th day of December A.D. 1880.

Hans Westgor, John Klovdahl, Julius Nelson, Edward Nelson, Mrs Edward Nelson, H. Delvo and Ingeborg Jorgensen, were present at that first meeting.

The record of this first meeting does not so state, but it is presumed that Rev. E. J. Homme officiated and conducted the service, and it may also be assumed that other and younger persons attended the services.

The first baptism performed in Wittenberg occurred on the 6th day of October 1881, when Jorgen the son of Edward Nelson was baptized.

On the fourth Sunday in Advent in the year 1881 the first Holy Communion services was held.

On the 11th day of June in the year 1882, immediately after a public church service, a meeting was held for the purpose of organizing a congregation. Present at that meeting was A. K. Dahl, Andrew Gunderson, Christian Gulbrandsen, Erick Anderson, Edward Nelson, Gilbert Paulson, Anton Gunderson, Hans Westgor, Joseph Boren, Ludvig Fallestad, Bernt Knutson, Andrew Nelson, Helge Overen, Ingeborg Johnson and Rev. Homme. This assembly agreed to organize and become members of a congregation to be known as Immanuel Norwegian Evan. Luth. Church of Wittenberg Wisconsin.

On the 6th day of January 1883 the congregation held its first annual meeting. At this meeting they adopted a set of rules or constitution, and elected the following officers.

Hans Westgor was elected as "Forstander", or Deacon.

Andrew Gunderson was chosen for trustee and treasurer for one yr.

Peter Olson was elected trustee for 2 years and Hans Erickson for trustee for three years.

Jacob Lunde was elected Secretary.

At the annual meeting of the congregation held on the 7, day of January 1884, Rev. Homme informed the meeting that the articles of incorporation, of the congregation, had been placed on record with the County register of deeds.

The congregation had no church. It appears from the records that most, if not all their meetings were held in the school room at the newly built Orphan Home.

At the annual meeting held on the 5th day of January 1885, Rev. Homme informed the congregation that a deed to the church site and cemetery ground had been executed and placed on record.

At this same meeting they elected a committee who was to take the necessary preliminary steps toward the building of a church. The committee consisted of the following members, Peter Schlytter, Hans Madtson, Helge Overen, Jens Solomonsen and Jons Swenholt.

At the annual meeting held on January 6, 1886, a new church building committee was named, this time the committee members were Rev. Homme, Hans Westgor, Hans Madtson, Peter Schlytter and Ole Nelson. At this meeting too the congregation was informed by the Pastor that a communion set had been purchased for their account at an outlay of \$12.

In the evening on Holy Thursday 1886, "Skjærthersdag", there was held a congregation meeting. At this meeting Rev. Homme read a new constitution and governing rules for the congregation which were adopted and ordered printed in pamphlet form. At this meeting the congregation decided to apply for membership in the Norwegian Synod.

On Sunday the 30th day of May 1886, was held a meeting at which the congregation elected one Andrew Gulbrandsen, Morris, Wisconsin, to represent them at the Synod Meeting held in Oconomoc, Wisconsin, that year.

At the annual meeting held on the first Monday in January 1887, Rev. Homme informed the congregation that the foundation wall for the new church was completed and that there was 26000 ft. of lumber at the site, for the upper structure of the proposed church building.

On the 31, day of May 1887 the congregation held a meeting and elected ~~Thaugan~~ T. Haugan, to represent it at the next Synod meeting.

At this same meeting occurred the first recorded withdrawals of members from the congregation. The record states that Joseph Boren, Ludvig Fallestad, Hans Erickson and Martin Berntsen, withdrew (without giving any reason for their withdrawal.)

At the annual meeting held on Jan. 11, 1888, there were 27 voting members present. This meeting voted unanimously to withdraw from membership in the Norwegian Synod. The reasons given for the withdrawal was to preserve the peace in the congregation and in that way better promote its own affairs.

The records of a meeting held on June 5, 1890, states that the congregation adopted the constitution of the United Nor. Luth. Church, and elected Prof. Rygh to represent them at <sup>the</sup> ensuing union meeting. (At that same congregation meeting, Jacob Lunde, who had been secretary of the congregation since its organization, and who in many other ways had taken part in its activities, withdrew his membership, stating that he took the view of the Synod in the dispute between the church people.)

(The treasurer's report to the congregation at its annual meeting held on Jan. 8th, 1894, shows that the congregation had a debt of \$992.60.)

(At the annual meeting held on Jan. 7th, 1895, the treasurer reported that during the last past year he had received \$51. for minister's salary.)

The annual meeting held on Jan. 3, 1898, adopted Landstad's Hymn Book as the official hymn book of the congregation.

In the records of the congregation it appears, for the first time in the minutes of the meeting held on Jan. 6, 1902, that organizations within the congregation did any thing substantial to assist it. In the records of that meeting it is stated that the Young Peoples Aid Society gave \$68.49 to the congregation and agreed to provide for the additional funds needed to procure the Alter Painting now in the church. At that same meeting the Ladies Aid Society agreed to pay the cost of steel sheeting and decorating the interior of the church.

The records does not state the exact time when the church was dedicated, but this matter was given consideration at a meeting held on Aug. 17, 1902, and it seems probable that the church was dedicated the latter part of that same year. At that same meeting (of Aug. 17, 1902) Rev. Homme was authorized to purchase a church bell for the congregation.

It appears from the records that the last congregation meeting attended by Rev. E. J. Homme, the organizer and Pastor of the congregation for a period (of time) of more than 20 years, was held on Jan. 5th, 1903.

Under date of June 21, 1903, Rev Homme resigned as Pastor for the congregation, in ~~with~~ writing the congregation trustees as follows;

"Til trusteeerne for Immanuel's Menighed i Wittenberg, Wisconsin."

"Da jeg paa grund af nedbrudt helbred ikke ser mig istand til at betjene menigheden længere saa indsender jeg til menighedens Embedsmand min resignation som træder i kraft fra 1ste, September dette Aar"

"Til Hr. C. O. Reed, Hr. Hildus Rolfson og Hr. Ole Johnson".

E. J. Homme, Menighedens Prest."

Rev. E. J. Homme died the following day, on June 22nd, 1903.

Rev. O. C. Farseth succeeded Rev. Homme in the pastorate of the congregation late in the year 1903.

Late in the year 1904, Rev. Farseth resigned from the pastorate and Rev. K. O. Eidahl served as temporary Pastor until the latter part of the year 1905 when Rev. P. P. Houglum took up the charge as Pastor of the congregation.

On the 9th day of June 1907 the congregation celebrated its 25th, anniversary. Rev. Farseth, Rev. A. L. Dahl and Rev. Jens Mathison, were outside pastors that took leading parts in the celebration.

At the annual meeting held on Jan. 8, 1908, the congregation adopted a new, or revised constitution and By-laws.

In a report to the congregation, by Rev. Houglum, at its annual meeting on Jan 3, 1910, it is stated that the congregation had a voting membership of 59, a confirmed membership of 180 and total number of ~~souls~~ 271 souls.

In April 1911 Rev. Houglum resigned as Pastor of the congregation and from that time until the early part of the year 1912, Rev. J. A. Wang served

as temporary pastor.

Early in the year 1912 Rev. N. Lunde became the pastor of the congregation, and served as such until he resigned from the pastorate late in the year 1918.

At the annual meeting of the congregation on the 3rd, of January 1918, a committee of 5 members was named. This committee, consisting of ~~Sts~~ I. J. Nelson, O. B. Hagen, O. R. Wilson, Hildus Rolfson and Erick Hanson, was authorized to confer with the Bethany Congregation of Wittenberg, and endeavor to agree with them on the terms for a merger of the two congregations.

On the 20 day of November 1918, a joint meeting of members of the Bethany and Immanuel Congregations was held. At that meeting it was unanimously agreed by and between the members of the two congregations to dissolve their respective organizations and merge into one congregation to be known as the First Lutheran Church of Wittenberg.

Rev. L. L. Masted was called and took charge as pastor of the congregation early in the year 1919, and served as pastor until the latter part of the year 1923, when he resigned, from the pastorate.

In March 1924 Rev. T. Aug. Lillehei became the pastor <sup>of the congregation</sup> and has since served the congregation as its minister down to the present time.

At the annual meeting held on the 21, day of Jan. 1929 the congregation changed its official language from Norwegian to English.

At the annual meeting held on the 18, day of January 1932, a revised constitution and By-laws was adopted.

(Besides the regularly called pastors who have served this congregation, it has also been served by other pastors whom Rev. Homme employed to assist him. According to the records Rev. Minne came here in the year 1887. Rev. M. C. Holseth, in the year 1892, and Rev. C. K. Helland in the year 1896. The record does not reveal the time these pastors left here.)

The first three persons to serve this congregation as members of its board of deacons <sup>was</sup> Hans Westgor, Jens Solomonsen and Prof. Eikeland.

The present board of deacons, or Church Council as we call it now, consists of the Pastor, Nels Jacobson, Hildus Rolfson and L. A. Larson.

The first board of trustees consisted of Andrew Gunderson, Peter Olson and Hans Erickson.

The members of the present board of trustees are; T. C. Carlson, E. J. Bentson, Carl Nelson, Gust Norrbom and O. B. Hagen.

As Secretary Jacob Lunde served from 1882 until 1889, Chas Erickson from 1889 to 1898, Arne Johnson from 1899 to 1910, N. A. Findall from 1911 to 1913, O. B. Hagen from 1914 to 1919 and Arne Johnson from 1919 down to the present time.

Andrew Gunderson was elected Treasurer on Jan. 6, 1883, and served as such for several years, since then the following have served as treasurer; Peter Olson, Gilbert Paulson, Hildus Rolfson, L. A. Larson, Just Johnson, Iver Nelson and Arthur Christensen, the present treasurer.

Many persons have served the congregation as organist, notably Mrs. John Englund, in the Nineties and up to the year 1903, and again from 1921 down to the present time.

From the earlier records of the congregation it is noted that several persons were interested in Sunday School work, outstanding among these are Ole Johnson Sr. and Nels Jacobson. At the present time the congregation has a flourishing Sunday school. The staff of instructors are Nels Jacobson Supt. Mrs. Ed Westlund Asst. Supt. Alvin Johnson, Lillian Lillehei, Mrs. S. P. Iverson, Marjion Larson and Clara Mickelson.

Rev. John Lawrence is the leader and instructor of a large and promising Bible class.

Even in this brief synopsis of our history it would be an indication of ingratitude to refrain from mentioning organizations within our congregation who have in so many ways assisted and, or taken the lead in rendering service to the church.

The Ladies Aid Society of our congregation has not only, as usual in such organizations, interested itself in Missions, Charity and education,

but it has also, from time to time, assumed large financial obligations for making additions, alterations and decorations in our church edifice and parsonage. The congregation records does not state when the Ladies Aid Society was organized, but no doubt this occurred in the early eighties.

The present officers of the Ladies Aid Society are Mrs. Ed Westlund, Pres. Mrs. Selmer Schlytter Vice Pres. Mrs. S.P. Iverson Sec'y. and Mrs. William Gates Treasurer.

About the year 1893 Rev. Homme organized the first Young Peoples Society, known as the "Unge's Forbund", and since that time the young people of the congregation has remain<sup>ed</sup> organized under different names until many years ago they became known as the Young Peoples Luther League.

The Young Peoples Society has manifested an interest in church work in general and have materially aided the congregation by procuring the Alter Painting, organs etc., and in other ways contributed to the church.

The officers, at the present time, are Mr. E.J. Bentson Pres. Gerda Jacobson Vice Pres. Elaine Rehder Sec'y. and Marion Larson Treas.

About a year ago a new organization was effected within our congregation, which gives promises of being able to accomplish much good. This organization is the Lutheran Brotherhood. The officers are Rev. John Lawrence Pres. Gust Norrbom Vice Pres. and Alvin Johnson Sec'y-Treas.

May the Lord of the Church be with our congregation in the future so that it will fulfill its main mission, that of leading souls to Christ.

Arne Johnson, Secretary.