

History of Immanuel Lutheran Church

It was through the missionary zeal and courageous faith of members of Grace Lutheran Church and their pastor, Dr. Arnold H. Grumm, that a new congregation was organized in north Fargo. In 1949, land was purchased for a church site at Broadway and 13th Avenue N. With the help of the North Dakota District, Grace Lutheran built a small chapel at the west end of this site in the fall of 1949. The first Sunday School classes were held January 22, 1950 and the first Sunday services at the end of February. Services continued in the chapel until a new structure was dedicated on December 7, 1952.

On March 14, 1950, 19 voting members were released from Grace to organize the new church. Those 19 were: Carl Brandt, Hilmer Brehmer, Melvin Erickson, Walter Fleischer, Barney Gaugler, Herbert Kay, Eugene Keehn, Otto Matzek, Arnim Melchert, Paul Meyer, A. J. Paulson, George Radtke, Joe Rhinhart, Dr. W. Romberg, Ted Schmidt, Alvin Struck, Gerhard Ulland, C. C. Ward, and R. K. Watson. This group adopted the name Immanuel, adopted a constitution and by-laws, and called the Rev. John Lutz (Helen), of Williston, North Dakota, as their first pastor. Pastor Lutz was installed May 7, 1950.

The first elected officers were: Robert K. Watson, President; Carl Brandt, Vice President; George Radtke, Secretary; Clifford Struck, Treasurer; and Hilmer Brehmer, Financial Secretary. Elders were Carl Brandt, Robert Watson and Herbert Kay. Trustees were Dr. Romberg, Barney Gaugler, and Fred Stadlander. Board of Christian Education members were C. O. Anderson, Otto Matzek and A. J. Paulson.

The first baby baptized in the congregation was Martha Edith, daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Lutz on June 4, 1950. The first baby baptized in the new church building was LaVonne Rae Pherson on January 18, 1953. Also baptized the same day was Patricia Ann Ellingson; and this was the initial use of our present Baptismal Font which had been given as a gift from LaVonne's grandfather, Herbert Kay.

Organizations were quickly formed. Immanuel Ladies Guild (LWML) was organized on May 18, 1950 with 23 charter members; The Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL) on May 29, 1950 with 15 charter members; Walther League on October 12, 1950 with 10 charter members; Cradle Roll in September 1950 and the Mixed Choir on October 17, 1950.

At the Voters' meeting on November 10, 1950, Foss and Company were secured as architects to draw up plans for a new church. A Building Committee was formed with George Radtke, Carl Brandt, and C. O. Anderson. The Finance Committee was Otto Matzek, R. K. Watson and A. J. Paulson. A ground-breaking service was held October 21, 1951, and excavation began the following day. Work continued in the spring of 1952 and the new church was dedicated December 7, 1952. At the time of dedication the membership was 321 souls, 159 communicants, 112 in Sunday School, 61 in Cradle Roll, and 41 in Bible Classes. By the time of the 5th Anniversary in 1955, membership was up to 475 souls and 250 communicants.

Pastor Lutz accepted a call in late summer of 1956 to St. John's Lutheran Church in Chicago. Immanuel remained without a pastor until March 17, 1957 when Rev. Carl Schrader (Magdaline) from Redeemer Lutheran Church, Wichita, Kansas, was installed.

Three months later, on June 20, 1957, a tornado struck north Fargo and considerable damage was done to Immanuel and the parsonage. It was a Thursday night at 7:40 p.m. The regularly scheduled Sunday School teachers' meeting had been cancelled, but several teachers were there and found safe refuge in the basement of the church. Three days later on Sunday, June 23, services were held at Washington School. Later the services and Vacation Bible School were held at Ben Franklin School. The sermon for Sunday, June 30 was entitled "Rebuilding the Walls of Zion". On July 9, 1957 Roel Construction Company was approved as the new building contractor and the new building was dedicated on March 23, 1958. A special "Week of Dedication" followed, with special services and dedication events.

Pastor Schrader accepted a call to Christ the King Lutheran Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and preached his final sermon at Immanuel on March 29, 1959. Rev. Alfred Thiem (Betty) of Anamoose, North Dakota, accepted our call and was installed on October 18, 1959. During the vacancy, Immanuel was served very capably by two vicars, Don Ehlers and Keith Fox.

Seminary students who served their vicarage under Pastor Thiem's spiritual guidance were as follows: Keith Fox (1959-60), Miss A. Hiller (Peterson) Deaconess Training, Parish Worker (1960-61), Joel Vogel (1961-62), Kenneth Mangelsdorf (1962-63), James Johnson (1963-64), Ivan Gunderman (1964-65), Robert Beyer (1965-66), Alden Beversdorf (1966-67), John Stehr (1967-68), William Seeburg (1968-69), Robert Luinstra (1969-70), James Troyke (1970-71), David Petrich (1983-84), and James Keuch (1984-85).

A special service was held on Sunday, May 1, 1960 for the 10th Anniversary. Rev. Arnim Melchert (charter member and Immanuel's first seminary student) delivered the sermon. It was Arnim Melchert who had submitted the name "Immanuel" back at the organizational meeting.

On August 7, 1960 Rev. Clemens Hartfield was commissioned as a missionary for a new mission congregation in West Fargo. This later resulted in St. Andrew Lutheran Church.

Women's Bible Classes in the homes were first organized in September 1964 through the efforts of Esther Reardon. Mission Festivals were revitalized in October 1964. Immanuel was the first congregation in the North Dakota District to start a Social Ministry Program. The Board of Social Ministry became very active in the 1970's as Immanuel sponsored several Vietnamese refugee families.

Campus Ministry has been an ongoing effort at Immanuel. The vicarage program facilitated the Pastor's involvement in Campus Ministry. The program was further advanced when Rev. Robert Luinstra (Donna) was called as Co-Pastor and installed August 8, 1971. He accepted a call in August 1973 to Iowa. Immanuel then called Bruce Wurdeman (MJ) to serve as Director of Christian Education and he was installed on June 30, 1974.

Our Youth Ministry became more active in the later 1970's. A Servants of the Savior (S.O.S.) group was formed in 1975 for the seventh and eighth graders. The high school group has seen the name of its group change from Walther League, to Active Christian Teens (ACT), to Lutheran Youth Fellowship (LYF). Bruce Wurdeman accepted a call to Eureka, Missouri, in September, 1980. David Sauer continued the DCE program from 1981 to 1982. From September 1983 through August 1985 we were served by vicars David Petrich and James Keuch. Pastor Dennis Morner (Jacque) accepted the call as Assistant Pastor in October 1985.

Since Immanuel was founded as a mission congregation, missions have always played a vital role in the congregation. The voters annually set aside a substantial portion of the regular offerings as mission giving, used for district, synodical and world missions. In addition to helping form St. Andrew in West Fargo in 1960, Immanuel was the "mothering" congregation for Beautiful Savior in south Fargo, In October 1982, Immanuel transferred 65 members to Beautiful Savior and Pastor Thiem was the initial shepherd for that congregation.

One of the first major remodeling projects to our church occurred in 1982. This was termed the "Care-Repair-Share" project when we added a handicap ramp, and did major roof re-insulation and shingling. Another major remodeling project was completed in 1989 when the narthex was enlarged, an elevator installed, and a new bathroom completed.

Pastor Morner accepted a call to Prescott Valley, Arizona, in October 1987. Rev. James Gimbel (Jill) from Kramer/Gardena, North Dakota, was called to be assistant pastor and arrived in August 1988. Pastor Gimbel organized many servant events, such as the youth trip to Bethesda Lutheran Home in Wisconsin, and college students and adult trips to Texas and Mexico. Immanuel continues to support these trips today with their prayers and dollars.

Other highlights of the 1980's included the first Elders' Pancake Day in February 1983, Family Serving Groups being organized in 1986, and Confirmation being changed from seventh through ninth grades to sixth through eighth grades, with a double class confirmed May 1991. Confirmation was later changed to the fall of the year, near Reformation Sunday, following a 6-week review for all ninth graders and parents.

The 1990's saw the congregation really starting to grow and physical space becoming a problem. A Long Range Planning committee was formed in the mid-80's to look at future growth and needs. From September 1994 through May 1998, three classrooms were rented from Shanley High School for Sunday School.

The Fixer-Upper group was formed in 1990 under the direction of Mel Kaeding. This was a group of mainly retired men who began to meet on Mondays and Thursdays for Bible study and doing odd jobs around the church. This has proven to be a valuable asset for the trustees and a real money saver for the congregation, as various improvements projects were completed. This group continues to meet today and is very active.

Pastor Thiem retired from the active ministry June 30, 1991. A large celebration was held on May 19, 1991 in recognition of Pastor's and Betty's nearly 32 years of faithful service to Immanuel. He would continue to serve the North Dakota District as a part-time chaplain for the Fargo hospitals. Pastor James Gimbel accepted the call to serve as Senior Pastor and Pastor Bernard Worrall (Carolyn) from Chadron, Nebraska, arrived in December 1991 to serve as Campus Pastor. Another retirement occurred in 1994 as our very faithful church office secretary Jean Larson retired after over 32 years of dedicated service. Others serving as church secretary since then have been Leslie Striegel, Esther (Miller) Stevenson, Darlene Gross (Miller), Cori Trautman, and our current secretary Louise Tegtmeier.

Immanuel's caring attitude was again evidenced many times in the 90's from the "Do-it-for-Dale" - "Caring for Caroline" benefit in 1992, assistance for flood families in 1997, and other assistance dinners for families with special medical needs. Our zeal for missions continued as we became involved with direct sponsorship of missionaries, including Tom Edelen in Venezuela, Derek Broten in Germany, Becky Bartelt in Kazakstan, Miriam Wolfgram in Taiwan, Amy Magedanz in Cote d'Ivoire, and Julie McManus in Kenya.

Long-range expansion took off in 1995, with the purchase of a house at 1249 7th Street N. In 1998 we were able to purchase the duplex at 1248-1250 Broadway and the 6-plex at 1244 Broadway. The last house at 1253 N 7th Street was purchased in 1999. This gave Immanuel room for further expansion of property and our mission in north Fargo. Our parking lot was completed in 2000. A fund-raising appeal named "Building on the Word" officially began in April 1996, followed by "Building on the Word II" in May 2001. During that time almost \$2,000,000 was raised through members' donations, rents on property and earnings on our money. TL Stroh Architects were hired to draw up the plans, which were approved in early 2004. The general contractor was T F Powers Construction and an official groundbreaking service was held on May 2, 2004. This project included our Welcome Center, Celebration Center, new offices, Sunday School rooms, a commercial kitchen, plus handicap-accessible bathrooms. Construction continued through the end of 2004 and we dedicated the new addition in January 2005. Upon completion of the work, we had a balance due on a loan with LCEF for slightly over \$500,000. Members' contributions continued for nearly ten years to pay off this loan, with the final dollars coming in during December 2014. Praise be to God for the generosity and faithful stewardship of our members.

This building project has been a real blessing to the congregation. Some of these benefits include more fellowship through congregational dinners, Advent and Lenten suppers, and an expanded space for coffee and fellowship between services. We have also seen an increase in attendance at Adult Bible Class, plus better classrooms and learning facilities for our children. Other activities we have been able to host include Sheltering the Homeless, renting space to the YMCA for daycare, and special wedding and anniversary receptions.

In August 1996 Pastor Gimbel accepted a call to serve our synod with Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis, Missouri. Pastor Worrall was called to serve as Interim Senior Pastor and served that capacity until May 1997, when Rev. Roger Sedlmayr (Joyce) arrived from Stony Plain, Alberta, Canada. Pastor Worrall continued to serve as our Campus Ministry pastor.

On October 22, 2000 Immanuel celebrated its 50th Anniversary. Three services were held that day and the guest preachers were former pastors John Lutz, Jim Gimbel, and Alfred Thiem. On Saturday October 21, a special meal and program was held at the Evergreen Conference Center. Guest speaker that evening was Bruce Wurdeman, former DCE at Immanuel. All of the services had lots of special music from various choirs, instrumentalists, and organists.

Our ministry was enhanced in 2000 by the addition of a Director of Christian Education (DCE). Tim Roggow served us from August 2000 until 2002. Denise Coleman served us from 2003 – August 2006. Our current DCE Ryan Avery (Erica) was installed on March 30, 2008. The effects of this positive youth ministry can be seen by the number of youth who have gone on to synodical schools for training as full-time church workers. This emphasis was assisted by the establishment of the Refle-Frohberg scholarship fund, making money available for those students. Students who have gone to these schools include Jodie Pedersen, Rachel Sharpe, Jon Walla, Ed Bean, Nicole Sedlmayr, Danielle Sedlmayr, Bethany Meyer, Rebecca Trautman, Caleb Worrall, and Martha Semanko. Another highlight from this ministry was having one of our own youth, Jon Walla become a pastor. Jon was ordained on July 11, 2011 here at Immanuel by his father-in-law Pastor Sedlmayr. Jon is currently serving at Zion Lutheran Church in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Immanuel's youth are very active in Bible study and fellowship. Immanuel supports their attendance at National Youth Gatherings, servant events. Other youth activities include the annual cookie bake, the Spring Sing, and district and zone youth gatherings.

Music has always been an important element in the ministry at Immanuel. We have been blessed with many faithful organists, choir directors, vocalists, praise bands, brass ensembles, and instrumentalists. The original organ was replaced in 1980 and our current organ was installed in February 2002. The music ministry was enhanced by the addition of hand bells in 1996 and a grand piano in 2006. The current hymnal (LSB) arrived in 2006 and Immanuel hosted a hymnal workshop for area pastors and musicians.

Immanuel was very involved with the start-up of a new mission in southwest Fargo. Crosspointe Lutheran Church had their first service on Easter Sunday 2008. Pastor Michael Giddings was called as their pastor. Both Pastors Sedlmayr and Worrall provided Crosspointe with valuable mentoring and supervision. In February 2007 we had fun afternoon of music and entertainment to raise funds for the Crosspointe music ministry. (Who can forget the Blues Pastors?)

Pastor Sedlmayr accepted a call to Twin Falls, Idaho in March 2011. Pastor Worrall was then called to be our senior pastor and we were assisted by Mark Madson in the interim. Pastor Steve Schulz (Susan) from Storm Lake, IA accepted our call to be our Associate/Campus pastor and was installed December 2011. Pastor Schulz was student at NDSU in 1984 and a member of the FLYA group. His wife Susan is a daughter of the congregation.

The year 2015 finds Immanuel Lutheran a vibrant, active congregation of 856 baptized souls and 664 communicants. We are richly blessed by our Lord Jesus.

Immanuel is definitely in the Word! Our Sunday School has a current enrollment of 100 plus a high school

Bible class that assists with the Sunday School openings. The Sunday morning adult Bible class averages around 70 per week, plus we have several weekday Bible classes for men, women, seniors, college students. And youth. We are blessed by a very active lay ministry and the giving of innumerable hours of volunteer time by the many officers, Sunday School teachers, Bible Class leaders, quilters, LWML, fixer-uppers, musicians, committees, etc., etc. We are all guided and led by our faithful shepherds, Pastor Worrall, Pastor Schulz, and DCE Avery. This is Immanuel! Thanks be to God!

~ * ~

THANK YOU, CURT SOMMER, FOR WRITING THE 65-YEAR HISTORY OF IMMANUEL. CURT GLEANED INFORMATION FROM ELLIE RADTKE'S 25-YEAR HISTORY AND THE ANNUAL REPORTS FOR THE LAST 40 YEARS. THANKS, CURT.