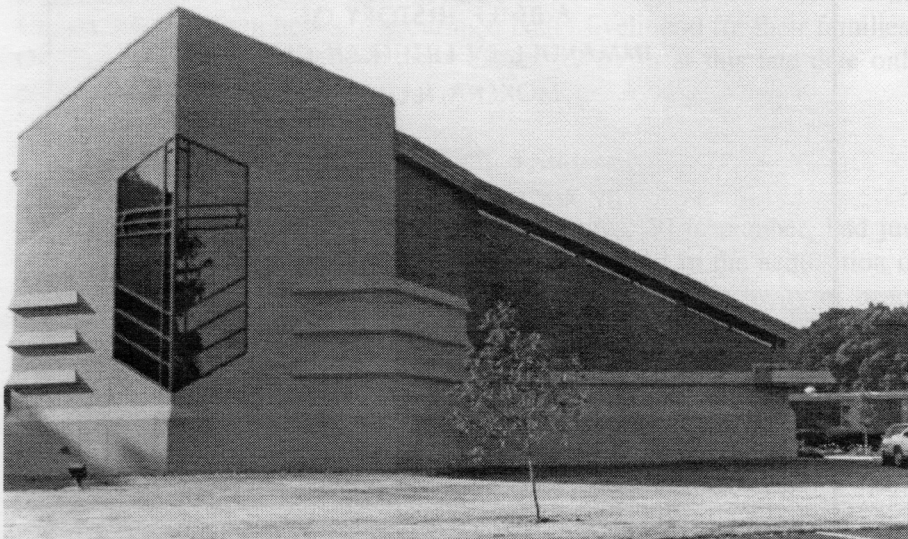


God With Us At Immanuel



Fifth Church 1994

A History of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church

**10731 W. LaPorte Road
Mokena, Illinois 60448**

GOD WITH US AT IMMANUEL

A BRIEF HISTORY OF
IMMANUEL EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MOKENA, ILLINOIS

BY AUGUST J. BUELTMANN, TH.D.

WRITTEN FOR THE 110TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF IMMANUEL
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONGREGATION
NOVEMBER 4, 1960

Above is an exact reproduction of the cover to Pastor August J. Bueltmann's history of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church of Mokena, Illinois, the first history of the church ever published.

CHAPTER 1. THE FIRST YEARS

It was an exciting time, it was a time of unrest, it was a stirring time, it was a perilous time, those middle years of the 19th century. In 1848 revolutions took place in France, Austria, Italy, and the German states. When the democratic revolutions in Austria and the German states proved abortive, many of those favoring democratic ideals immigrated to the United States. Was this the cause that moved the group of families that became founders of Immanuel Lutheran Church to immigrate in 1848? Or did they come to the United States only in hopes of securing a better livelihood for their families? Or was there some other motivating cause? We can at this late date only conjecture as to their reasons.

Only 30 United States

In that mid-19th century the United States, 30 in number, had just come through the Mexican War, a war which resulted in the acquisition of California by the United States. Just a few days before the treaty of peace was signed in February, 1848, gold was discovered in California and a rush began for the California gold fields. These were the exciting days of the Forty-niners. But gold fever evidently did not infect Immanuel's founding fathers, who bought prairie land in Will County, Illinois, from the government and settled down to get their gold from the rich black earth of Illinois by the toil of their hands and the sweat of their brows.

The land on which they settled was virgin prairie. Although it was only about thirty-five miles from Chicago, a thriving city of 32,000, Frankfort township had received its first settlers only 18 years before. Four out of the five pioneer families, when the war whoops of Black Hawk and his warriors warned them that Hickory Creek was no safe abiding place, returned to the Wabash settlements in Indiana, whence they had come. Two of these families returned after the Black Hawk war in the spring of 1834 and were gradually joined by others to make up the Hickory Creek settlement.

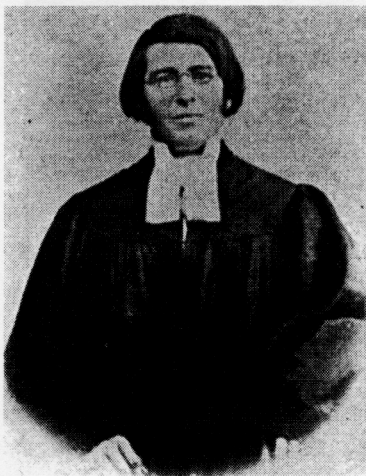
There was but one village in Frankfort township when these German immigrants who were to found Immanuel congregation arrived. This village was quite new, having been laid out in 1848-49 and named Chelsea. A Chelsea post office antedated the village, having been established in 1837. When the office was first established the mail was brought by "horse express fast line" from La Porte, Indiana, to Joliet once a week. Prior to the establishment of the village the settled area of the township was known as the Hickory Creek settlement, or Yankee settlement.

Eleven Years Before Secession

On March 3, 1849, General Zachary Taylor was inaugurated as the twelfth president of the United States. That year California asked admission to the Union as a free state. President Taylor recommended that it be so admitted but the South threatened to secede from the Union unless California was divided and the southern half admitted as a slave state. From the founding of the government to the Civil War the darkest and the most threatening year for the nation was 1850. The South was greatly agitated over free California; the North was divided, some willing to yield to the South for the sake of peace, others declaring that slavery should approach no further on free soil. While the country was in this unsettled state, Congress met and Henry Clay proposed an Omnibus Bill to settle the difficulties by compromise. In the midst of debates on this bill, President Taylor died and Millard Fillmore, the vice-president, became president.

The families who established Immanuel congregation were probably little concerned about the national turmoil, but they were concerned about forming a congregation and finding a pastor to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments.

First Pastor is a Missionary



Rev. Anton August Weyel
Immanuel's first pastor
1850-1852

Meanwhile a pastor, Anton August Philip Weyel, had been ordained and installed in Zion congregation, Crete, Illinois, on October 31, 1849. But this peripatetic, mission-minded 37-year old pastor could not be satisfied with serving in one place. He had been appointed missionary for Will County and surrounding country and he intended to carry out his commission.

During his comparatively brief pastorate in Crete he traveled quite extensively; he visited places as far as fifty miles from Crete. He traveled on foot, with his gun and Phylax, a retriever, as company. Among the places which he is said to have visited were Joliet, Dundee, Downers Grove, Homewood, Blue Island, Addison, Schaumburg, and Niles.

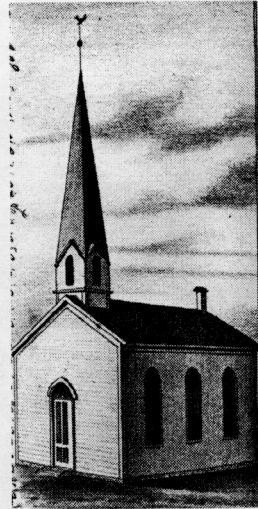
1850 - Immanuel is Organized

On his journeys Pastor Weyel had found Lutheran families in Frankfort township and decided to help them organize a congregation. In May, 1850, he moved to the Hickory Creek settlement and began serving these families. Several Swiss and Palatinate families with a Reformed Church background joined with the Lutheran families at first, but when Pastor Weyel celebrated Holy Communion according to the Lutheran rite, the Reformed families severed their connection with the group.

On November 4, 1850, the German Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel's Congregation was organized. The first elders and trustees were Casper Wannemacher, Johann Georg Geuther, and Heinrich Werner. Fifteen men are listed as charter members which means that fifteen families became members of the newly formed congregation.

Two Acres of Land Secured

The congregation joyfully and gratefully accepted the gift of two acres of land by trustee Johann Georg Geuther at what is now 88th Avenue and St. Francis Road. On the wooded hillside donated by Geuther a simple, small wooden church was built. In this building the pastor had his living quarters which were quite limited, especially since the family consisted of himself, his wife, and two or three children. This little church was to serve the congregation for 26 years. From its location the congregation came to be popularly known as "Immanuel on the Hill."



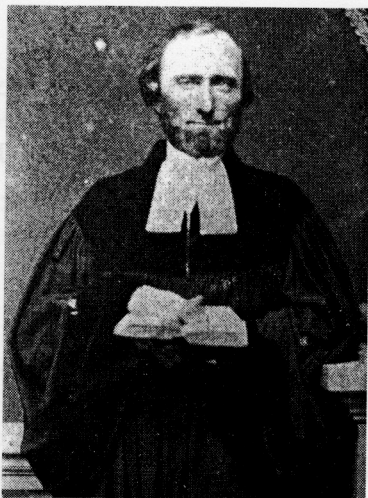
First Church

Pastor Serves From Crete

Two years after the organization of Immanuel, in November, 1852, Pastor Weyel accepted a call to Darmstadt, Indiana.

The vacant congregation it seems turned to Crete, whence their first pastor had come, for pastoral assistance and were served by Pastor C. A. T. Selle of Zion as an additional charge. He served Immanuel from November, 1852, to September, 1858, when he accepted a call to Rock Island, Illinois.

In the intervening years a congregation had been established in Town Rich. Since Town Rich was much closer to Immanuel than Crete, it seems likely that the congregation now asked John George Kuechle, pastor of Immanuel, Town Rich, to serve also Immanuel on the Hill. He served from September, 1858, to May, 1864.



Rev. C. A. T. Selle
1852-1858



Rev. George Kuechle
1858-1864

In 1861 the long smoldering resentment between the Northern and Southern states burst into flame when General Beauregard gave the order to fire on Fort Sumter. The bombardment of Fort Sumter opened the Civil War. The day after the surrender of the fort (April 15) President Lincoln called on the states of the Union for 75,000 troops of their militia.

Civil War Touches Immanuel

We do not know how many sons of Immanuel answered the call to the colors during the four years of civil strife, but Johann Philipp Fink enlisted on December 26, 1861, in the United States Army and became a member of Company F, 53rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment. He served his country bravely, but was taken prisoner in February, 1864, and sent to the infamous Andersonville prison in Georgia where he died and was buried in September 1864. On June 18, 1865, a memorial service was held for this son of Immanuel. The service was conducted in the Frankfort Methodist Church, probably because the little Immanuel church building was too small to hold those who came to honor the memory of this brave soldier.

All members Were Immigrants

Where did the families who made up Immanuel's early membership come from? Almost without exception, from Germany. The baptismal records of those early days (from 1864 on) list the birthplaces of both parents. Just a partial list of those places:

Weidhausen near Coburg

Hessen-Darmstadt near Frankfurt

Tuebingen near Wuertenburg

Neckarmach near Wuertenburg

Binswangen near Wuertenburg

Ostfriesland, kingdom of Hanover

Ens, kingdom of Prussia

Agnetenforf in Silesia

Wendorff in Mecklenberg Schwerin

CHAPTER II. A TIME OF BRIEF PASTORATES

After twelve years of being served by pastors of neighboring Lutheran congregations, Immanuel congregation in May, 1864, again had a resident pastor in the person of the Rev. Friedrich Leberecht Richter.

On July 31, 1864, a few months after coming to Immanuel, Pastor Richter had the joy of baptizing his own firstborn child, a son. The child was born June 10, 1864, and was given the name Johann Friedrich Theophilus. Pastor Richter selected seven sponsors for his son, three of whom, Johann Georg Geuther, John Werner, and John Wendel, were from the congregation. Of the other four, the most prominent was the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois, Francis A. Hoffman. Hoffman was a most remarkable character, talented and resourceful, a man who within 62 years of adult life actually had four careers and was successful in each of them. He was a churchman (Missouri Synod teacher and pastor); a financier; a politician; a journalist; and agricultural expert. He was Lieutenant Governor from January 14, 1861, to January 16, 1865.

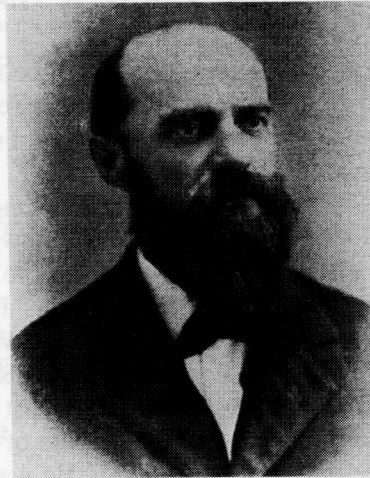
First Village Was Chelsea, Now Gone

Pastor Richter served Immanuel about a year and a half. He preached his farewell sermon on October 15, 1865. In the Lutheran "Kalendar" his address was given as Chelsea, Illinois. This was the first village in Frankfort township. It flourished for a time but when the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad was built through the township in 1852 and by-passed it and the Joliet cutoff of the Michigan Central, built in 1855, likewise bypassed the village, it was gradually abandoned and no trace of it remains. Records of St. Paul Church, Sieden Prairie, indicate that a Pastor Richter served it about this time, so he may have left Immanuel to serve St. Paul's. With the departure of Pastor Richter, Immanuel was to be without a resident pastor for the next fifty-two years.

Pastors Come and Go



Rev. Louis Lochner
1866-1867



Rev. Herman Wunderlich
1868-1871

Some time prior to April, 1867, the Rev. Louis Lecher of Immanuel, Town Rich, began serving Immanuel on the Hill in addition to his own congregation. When he accepted a call to Richmond, Virginia, and left Town Rich late in 1867, Immanuel on the Hill turned to Rev. Herman Wunderlich, first resident pastor of Trinity, Bachelor's Grove for pastoral care.

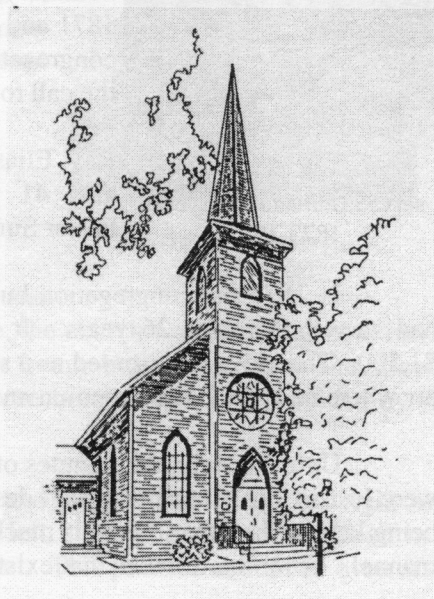
Pastor Wunderlich performed his first baptism at Immanuel on January 1, 1868, and continued to serve the congregation from Bachelor's Grove until the summer of 1871 when he accepted a call to Tolleston (now a part of Gary), Indiana.



Rev. John Christian Friedrich
Hartmann
1871-1873

Immanuel now was served again from Sieden Prairie where Pastor John Christian Friedrich Hartmann had been installed on February 6, 1870. In the fall of 1873 Pastor Hartmann accepted a call to St. Paul's, Woodworth, Illinois, and Immanuel was once more without a pastor.

This is St. Paul Lutheran Church where Pastor Hieber, described on the following pages, was the resident pastor. St. Paul was built in 1868 and is still being used for worship in the midst of a burgeoning population. For many years the address was "Sieden Prairie" but the present address is Matteson, IL. From here Pastor Hieber came to Immanuel every second Sunday rain or shine, hot or cold, snow or sleet to serve Immanuel from 1873 to 1915.



CHAPTER III. PASTORATE OF ELIAS HIEBER

During the first 23 years of its history Immanuel congregation had been served by seven different pastors. What effect this frequent change in the pastorate may have had on the little rural congregation is difficult to say. Perhaps they just took it for granted. At any rate this was to change entirely with the coming of Pastor Elias Hieber.



Rev. Elias Hieber
served Immanuel 41 years
1873-1915

On December 3, 1873, the Rev. Elias Hieber of Westville, Indiana, was installed in St. Paul's, Sieden Prairie, and he also served Immanuel on the Hill. He was born in Memmingen, Germany, not far from Munich. Here he received his early pre-seminary education. He emigrated to this country in 1847 with his parents and entered Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He was ordained in 1871 and that same year was installed as pastor of a congregation in Westville, Indiana, before accepting the call to St. Paul's.

Rev. Elias Hieber was pastor of Immanuel for more than 41 years, serving from December 1873 to Easter Sunday, April 4, 1915.

In 1877 the congregation built a new church to replace the one which had served them for 26 years. It was a neat frame building costing about \$1,500. The old church served as a school building and as an office for the pastor where he received communion announcements.

Unfortunately, the minutes of the congregational meetings prior to 1898 were lost in 1917 in a fire which destroyed the country home where they were being kept at the time. There is much they could tell us of the early days of Immanuel. From the minutes that exist it appears that a meeting was held once a

year to hear a financial report, and take such other action as was necessary.

When in 1873 Pastor Hieber was called to serve Immanuel as an additional charge, he was promised a salary of \$100 per year and \$1 per year per voting member for the services of an organist. In addition to his salary the pastor received gifts in kind, such as meat, vegetables, eggs, etc., but these were taken for granted and not specifically mentioned. He received his major salary, of course, from St. Paul's, Sieden Prairie, where he was the resident pastor.

The years flowed quietly by. Every two weeks Pastor Hieber's horse and buggy would arrive at the little frame church on the hill bringing the pastor and the organist. The pastor would preach and perform such pastoral duties as the occasion demanded. Holy Communion was celebrated two or three times a year. Baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals were conducted. In some cases Pastor Hieber, in the course of his 41 year ministry, baptized, confirmed, and married an individual and then baptized and confirmed his children.



Life in a Country Church

If it was a bitterly cold winter day and the custodian did not start the fire in time, the church was almost as cold inside as outside. Pastor Hieber just kept on his heavy buffalo-hide coat and slipped his frock over it. The organist almost froze because the draft provided by the bellows multiplied the misery.

Seating was segregated. Fathers and sons would sit on the right and mothers and daughters would sit on the left. The young men would sit in a group, usually on the right toward the front. This practice continued even after the move to Mokena.

Second Church
1877-1915

Contributions, usually coins, were dropped into a velvet bag attached to the end of a long stick wielded by an elder who would extend the bag down the length of the pews.

At the parsonage in Sieden Prairie Pastor Hieber kept a cow for milk and a horse for transportation, either hitched to a cart or buggy, or ridden horseback when mud or snow prevailed.

There were 22 children in the Hieber family, 14 by his first marriage and eight by his second.

Records Show Life was Hard

The church burial records of the early years disclose that life was frequently hard. Infant mortality, for example, was much higher than today, with "convulsions" a leading cause. Diphtheria and scarlet fever followed close behind. Death at all ages was frequently caused by what we know today as amoebic dysentery, a sickness associated with lack of refrigeration. Among adults lung disease shows up as a frequent cause of death. Yet many men and women lived to a ripe old age, some into their 70's, some into their 80's, and several into their 90's. Founder Geuther lived to 83; founder Wannemacher to 78.

A momentous change came in 1915. Pastor Hieber writes in the Church Record Book, In orderly congregational meeting on Easter Day 1915, with the assent of the undersigned, who served the congregation for over 41 years, it was unanimously resolved to move to Mokena. So that he could avail himself of the Lutheran pastors, Sandvoss and Zucker, one member Heinrich Schroth gave his consent with the reservation that the congregation grant him his ownership right to the cemetery (lots) and give him a peaceful release from the congregation. This the congregation granted. Immanuel was soon to have a new pastor and a new location.

CHAPTER IV. THE MOVE TO MOKENA



Rev. Raymond R. Reinke
first pastor in Mokena
1915-1918

Immanuel Congregation was now almost 65 years old. From Easter Day (April 14) 1915 Rev. Raymond R. Reinke of Blue Island served the congregation. The services were held every two weeks on Sunday afternoons.

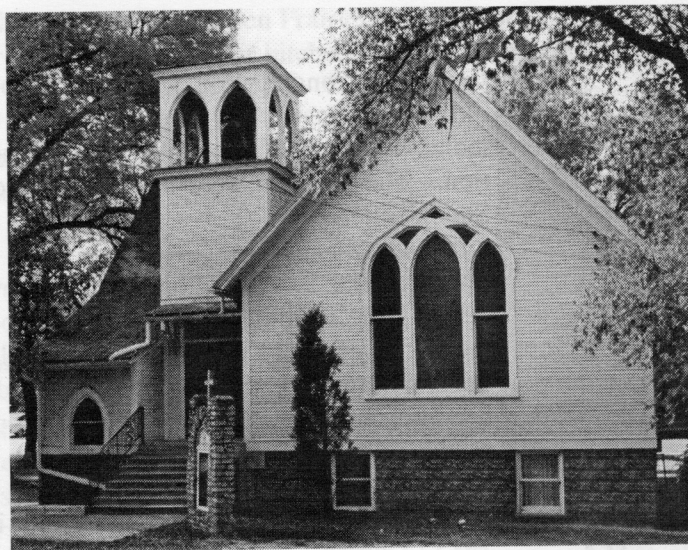
The financial means of the congregation were limited and the building of a new church loomed in its eyes as a very large project, so it gratefully accepted the opportunity to build its church on land which had been given to the village for public purposes by one of the village founders. Consequently the village held title to the land on which the church stood. The cornerstone of the new church was laid in October, 1915. George J. Hacker of Mokena was engaged as contractor. The building and furnishings cost \$4,706.

700 People Attend Dedication in 1916

Sunday, March 19, 1916, was an outstanding day in the history of Immanuel congregation for on that day its new church was dedicated. Seven hundred persons witnessed the three dedication services of the church. The morning and afternoon services were in German and the evening service in English.

The opening service was held at 10 o'clock. Rev. Raymond R. Reinke of Blue Island offered a short prayer at the church portal. Then the church doors were thrown open and the auditorium and Sunday School were soon filled. The dedication sermon was preached by Rev. E. Zucker of Beecher. The octet of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Joliet, sang. This same octet was to sing again at the 25th anniversary of the dedication. An offering for the benefit of the building fund was taken.

At noon dinner was served at the Mokena Hall. The ladies of Immanuel congregation had charge of the serving. In the evening a supper was served at the same hall.



**Third Church
Cross and Union, Mokena
1916-1966**

In the afternoon, at 2:15 o'clock, a service was held with Rev. John H. Schulz of Christ Lutheran Church, Orland Park, preaching. Pastors Zucker and Schulz received three dollars for their services. The evening service began at 6:45 and was given over to special music and songs with E. Wunderlich of Joliet singing a number of solos. Rev. Reinke preached the sermon. This service climaxed the day. The building was too small to hold all who came and many people had to be turned away.

A special train from Blue Island was backed down on the Rock Island at 8:45 to take Chicago, Blue Island, and Tinley Park guests back, as well as those from other points.

1887 Bell Moved to Mokena Church

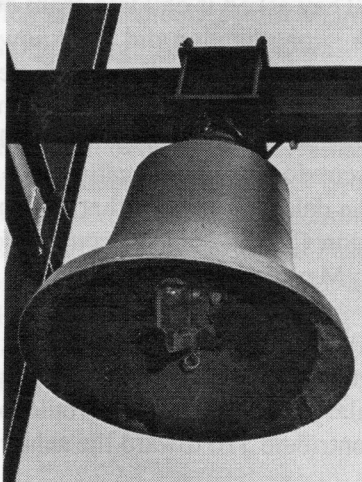
The bell that called worshippers to the services on dedication day was the same that had hung in the steeple of the little country church. It had been brought along to Mokena. This same bell has been calling worshippers to service and tolling the passing of members to their eternal home ever since. It was cast in 1887 by H. Stuckstede in St. Louis and weighed 1,100 pounds.

The old country church was torn down. The little churchyard cemetery was kept intact, and members of Immanuel congregation still use the little burying ground that was staked out by their great-grandfathers in 1850.

Several Lutheran families in Mokena now joined the congregation. At the 1916 convention of the Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Immanuel congregation joined the synod. It had had no prior affiliation although served by Missouri Synod pastors throughout its history.

Pastor Reinke continued to serve the congregation until October, 1918, when the congregation called a resident pastor.

123 years old and still ringing loud and clear as it did when first installed in the 1877 country church, in the 1916 village church, and now in the current church on LaPorte Road.



CHAPTER V. A RESIDENT PASTOR

Immanuel congregation had passed its 67th birthday. For 64 of those years it had had no resident pastor. The two year resident pastorate of Rev. Weyel (1850-52) and the seventeen month resident pastorate of Rev. Richter (1864-65) were so far in the past they were forgotten by the present members. The congregation was so accustomed to being served by the pastor of a sister congregation that were it not for the desire on the part of a number of members for a parish school, this arrangement might have continued indefinitely.

On January 3, 1918, at a meeting of the voting members, several strongly expressed the desire that a parish school be brought into existence in the congregation, taught by a pastor of their own. A resolution was then passed to ask the District Mission Committee to study the situation. It appears that some of the children to be confirmed had to travel daily by train to Blue Island for their instruction. What others did is not clear.

Immanuel Patiently Waits

A delegation of two pastors representing the Mission Committee met with the congregation on April 24th. They inquired as to the number of children who would attend the proposed school and were informed that there were twelve. They asked if children from outside the congregation were likely to attend. The congregation did not know. To the question whether the religious schooling could be taken care of some other way the congregation pointed out that the nearest parish schools were in Joliet and Blue Island. The delegation asked how much the congregation could raise towards the pastor's salary. After some discussion the congregation resolved to raise \$50 per month for this purpose. The delegation stated that it would give the information it had received to the Mission Committee and would inform the congregation of the Committee's action on May 1.

At the voters' meeting on May 1 the Mission Committee suggested that the congregation apply for a ministerial candidate (seminary graduate) and felt that a salary of \$60 a month would be satisfactory. The Mission Committee would contribute \$10 toward the salary.

Decision To Call Full-Time Pastor

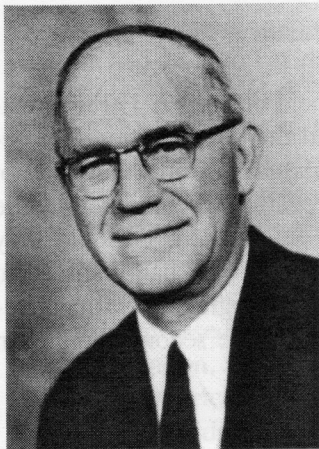
A special meeting of the congregation was held on July 7, 1918. President Brunn of the Northern Illinois District informed the congregation that because the number of calls exceeded the number of graduates, Immanuel had not received a graduate as pastor. He advised the congregation to continue a while longer with the same arrangements as heretofore. Some members held they should heed the president's advice. Others felt that since they had resolved to call a pastor they should carry out the resolution. The congregation finally resolved to lay the matter on the table until a meeting on the second Sunday in August.

Call to Pastor Extended

However, at the request of the District Mission Committee, a special meeting was held on July 15. The committee was of the opinion that Immanuel should have a pastor for the sake of the school-age children. The committee was prepared to grant a subsidy of \$10 per month toward the pastor's salary and since the congregation felt itself still somewhat weak also to pay the rent for a parsonage. President Brunn had suggested the names of Pastors Voelz and Maier as candidates for the pastoral office in Immanuel. Pastor Reinke offered the names of Pastors Carl Reis and E. Stolgenburg. An election was held forthwith and a call extended to Pastor Reis.

The next meeting recorded was held on September 22. A meeting evidently was held in the meantime at which a letter of Pastor Reis declining the call was read and the call sent to a Pastor Roecker. His letter declining the call was read at the September meeting. Pastor Reinke now suggested Pastor Walter Kemnitz, son of a teacher in his brother's congregation in Chicago, as a candidate. He explained that the people in Parshall, South Dakota, being served by Pastor Kemnitz, could be taken care of otherwise. A call was thereupon sent to Pastor Kemnitz. He accepted and was installed in October, 1918.

English Services Begin



Rev. W. J. Kemnitz
first resident pastor in Mokena
1918-1924

With the coming of a resident pastor many changes took place. Services were held every Sunday morning. English services were introduced. These were held at first on the first and third Sunday of the month in the evening. In March, 1919, it was resolved to hold an English service the last Sunday morning of each month. In October, 1922, a resolution called for English services every second and fourth Sunday. Eventually English services were held every Sunday morning and the use of German was gradually reduced.

The envelope system of contributions was introduced. A Ladies Aid Society was organized in 1919. The Sunday School was reorganized.

On September 3, 1919 a day school, taught by the pastor, was opened. One of the intriguing, but unanswerable, questions was whether a day school had been conducted previously to any extent in the history of the congregation. A member recalls that in her childhood, a parochial school teacher, Heinrich Licht, conducted a school for about two years, and then entered a business career. The only thing we can find out about this man is that his address was listed in the Lutheran "Kalendar" from 1878-84 as Matteson, Illinois. Perhaps if we had the congregational records, which were destroyed by fire, we could shed more light on this subject, for in the records available there is no record of a school prior to 1919.

After renting a home for the pastor for four years, the congregation purchased a home on Mokena Street, about a block and a half from the church, for a parsonage.

In July 1924 Pastor Kemnitz received and accepted a call as associate pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Dolton-Riverdale. He preached his farewell sermon in Mokena in September.

[illegible]

Above are reproductions of two entries in the Kirchenbuch (church book), one made in 1864 and the other in 1865. This old German script was used in Immanuel's book until 1923. All the records have been translated into modern English as noted on page 39. Literal translations are as follows:

To John George Geuther, junior, residing in Town Frankfort, Ills. a native of Weidhausen in Sachsen-Coburg and his wife Wilhelmine nee Eisenbrandt, a native of Treffurt, district of Erfurt, in Prussia on the 21st day of August 1865, a son born who on the 24th of September as of the 11th Sunday after Trinity 1865 received Holy Baptism and the name Johann. Sponsor: Georg Geuther, senior.

CHAPTER VI. THE PASSING YEARS

The Rev. Daniel C. Hennig of Grandfield, Oklahoma, was installed as pastor of Immanuel on September 21, 1924, and began his service in church and school.

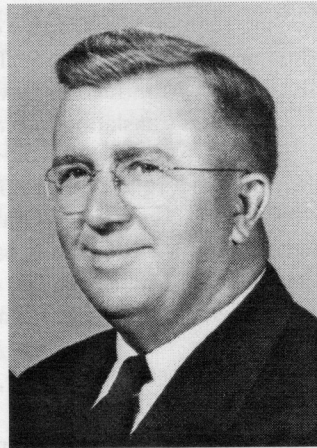
In July, 1927, the congregation decided to enlarge the schoolroom. The work was started at once and by the end of August a new spacious schoolroom was finished. Two years later, however, the day school was discontinued.

On January 12, 1930, Pastor Hennig was given a peaceful release by the congregation to accept a call as missionary-at-large for the Northern Illinois District. He preached his farewell sermon on January 26.

The Rev. Paul E. Schauer was installed as pastor on March 23, 1930. On June 9, 1930, the congregation voted to become self sustaining as of July 1. On Nov. 23, 1930, the congregation celebrated its 80th anniversary with Pastor Schauer preaching in the morning and Pastor W. F. Pieper of Lemont, Illinois, preaching in the afternoon.



Rev. D. C. Hennig
1924-1930



Rev. P. E. Schauer
1930-1931

In the fall of 1931 Pastor Schauer began to conduct Lutheran services in Grace Episcopal Church, New Lenox, and carried on the missionary activities in that community until January 1933 when he accepted a call to Immanuel Lutheran Church, De Kalb, Illinois.

Pastor Schauer on Nov. 24, 1931 resigned as pastor of Immanuel, Mokena.

Immanuel Fights Depression



Rev. W. J. Geffert
1932-1943

On January 17, 1932, the Rev. Walter J. Geffert was installed as pastor of Immanuel. These were depression years throughout the nation and as we read the minutes of the congregational meetings we find Immanuel resorting to one financial expedient after another to meet its obligations.

A Men's Club was organized in the congregation.

On September 8, 1935, the 85th anniversary of the congregation and the 20th anniversary of the dedication of the church building was celebrated with Rev. E. T. Lams preaching in the German service and Rev. Walter J. Kemnitz, former pastor, in the English. Rev. R. L. Sommer preached an English sermon in the evening.

It was not until the voters' meeting of July 6, 1936, that the voters decided that the minutes of their meetings "should hereafter be read in the English instead of the German language."

Ruth Society Organized

The Ruth Society, concerned primarily with the care of the altar and church appointments, was organized in 1939.

Mission work in New Lenox was re-activated in 1940, and Pastor Geffert conducted the first service on March 10, in the gymnasium of the public school. A basement church was constructed in 1942.

On November 10, 1940, the 90th anniversary of Immanuel congregation and the 25th anniversary of the dedication of its church building were observed. In a morning service Rev. Raymond R. Reinke, former pastor, was the guest speaker. Rev. Daniel C. Hennig, former pastor, preached in the evening service. At the morning service the octet from St. Peter's, that had sung at the dedication of the church building, sang at this 25th anniversary.



Rev. A. W. Gode
1943-1957

In March 1943 Pastor Geffert was granted a peaceful release to accept a call to Immanuel Church of Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

On May 30, 1943, the Rev. A. W. Gode was installed as pastor.

Pipe Organ Installed

A two-manual Wicks pipe organ was dedicated on Nov. 21, 1948. Rev. Herman Bauer of Chicago was guest speaker and Prof. Albert Beck of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, was guest organist.

On Nov. 5, 1950, the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary. In an afternoon service Rev. Arthur A. Brauer was the speaker and in the evening service, Rev. Walter J. Kemnitz, former pastor, gave the sermon. Pastor Gode, an accomplished musician, was the organist at both services.

Modern heating came to Immanuel in 1952. After 36 years of hand-firing a coal furnace, the custodian had only to set an automatic thermostat following the installation of an oil-fired forced air heating system.

CHAPTER VII. BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

In the spring of 1955 the congregation inaugurated a "Building for the Future" program with the purchase of 21 acres of land on LaPorte Road, just beyond the village limits, for \$10,500.

To raise funds to pay for the property and for a parsonage to come in the near future, the parishioners donated equipment and time to plant, cultivate, and harvest corn. For several years the land, which provided good pasturage, was rented to Edwin Yunker who as late as 1988 still operated a dairy farm cater-corner to the church property.

Use of German Stops

Services in the German language dwindled down to once a month, a communion service, until they were finally abandoned completely in the fall of 1957.

In the spring of 1956 the congregation released 36 communicants to form a second daughter congregation, this time in Frankfort. The communicant membership in consequence dropped to 140. By the end of 1957 it had risen again to 160.

On December 1, 1957, Pastor Gode preached his farewell sermon, having accepted a call to Lusk, Wyoming.

Land Free and Clear in 1959

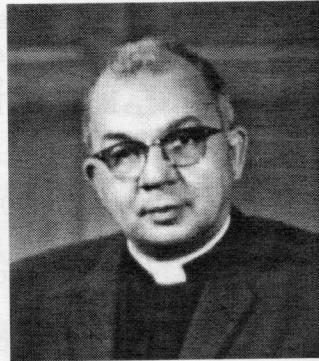
On January 10, 1959, the last note on the land purchased in the spring of 1955 was paid off. Also in January the first issue of "Items" appeared.

After a vacancy of thirteen months, the Rev. August J. Buelmann was installed as pastor on January 18, 1959.

The Lutheran Youth League, a young peoples' group, was organized. The Ladies Aid celebrated its 40th anniversary in a service at which Rev. W. J. Kemnitz, who had assisted in the founding of the Ladies Aid, preached the sermon.

The first Vacation Bible School in the history of the congregation was held in June, 1959 and proved very successful.

Double morning services during the summer months were inaugurated in 1959 and proved a happy arrangement since attendance suffered no drop during the summer months.*



Rev. A. J. Bueltmann, TH.D.
1959-1967

Parsonage built in 1960

A parsonage was built on the new church property and was dedicated on November 6, 1960, in connection with the observance of the 110th anniversary of the congregation. Final payment for the \$34,000 building was made in December, 1963.

On July 17, 1961, a Church Building Committee was elected. The committee was composed of the following: Chairman Robert O. Geuther, Donald Ambuehl, Raymond Bernard, Albert Janner, Melvin Moutrey, Robert Niemann, Walter Welsch, Pastor A. J. Bueltmann. Charles W. Johnson and Associates were engaged as architects on May 14, 1963.

*Except for the last two paragraphs of this booklet, this concludes the portion of this history as written by the Reverend August J. Bueltmann. Additional information about those first 110 years not available to him has been incorporated. This has mainly to do with Pastor Elias Hieber's pastorate, based on information in a detailed biography written by his son Paul.

On July 15, 1962, the congregation celebrated PAD (Pastor Appreciation Day) for Pastor Bueltmann. The affair was a total surprise to the pastor, who was feted in the afternoon at the Mokena Public School gymnasium. Former Pastor Raymond R. Reinke had the sermon. Later a slide presentation "This is Your Life, Pastor Bueltmann" traced his life from babyhood to 1962. The presentation, researched, photographed and written by Robert O. Geuther, was narrated by Pastor Harold J. Wunderlich, a seminary classmate of Pastor Bueltmann.

Ground Broken for New Church

On September 11, 1964, the contract to build the new building was awarded and ground was broken on September 13, 1964. The Pastor guided a "sod-buster" plow pulled by the members.



Breaking ground for the new 1966 Church with a sod-buster plow September 13, 1964. Pastor Bueltmann and Robert O. Geuther, president of the congregation and chairman of the Building for the Future committee, guide the plow as members of the congregation pull it through the sod

Meanwhile the cornerstone of the 1916 church was retrieved. Its contents, which had been hermetically sealed in a copper box and were in pristine condition, and which cost the grand total of \$2.50, included:

Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gesangbuch
Kurze Auslegung des Kleinen Katechismus
Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism
Dritte Lesebuch fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Schulen
Third Reader Standard American Series,
Concordia Publishing House
Die Bibel (The Bible)
Synodal-Bericht des Nord-Illinois Distrikts 1915
Der Lutheraner 19 Januar, 1915

Then on July 11, 1965, the cornerstone of the new church was laid. Its contents included items from the 1916 cornerstone plus these items:

Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version
Luther's Small Catechism, 1943
Lutheran Witness Reporter, Vol. 1 No. 1 May 9, 1965
The Lutheran Witness, April 20, 1965
Mokena News Bulletin, October 22, 1964
Mokena News Bulletin, June 3, 1965
Indenture deeding original church grounds to congregation
Photograph of groundbreaking 10-18-64
Constitution and Bylaws of Immanuel
Constitution, Ladies Aid
Constitution, The Ruth Society
Constitution, Lutheran Youth League
Constitution, The Men's Club
Praise and Prayer Book, Lutheran's Women's
Missionary League
1966 Church Fund-Raising Brochure "God's Challenge to Us"
Brochure, "Immanuel Invites You"
Brochure, "What You Should Know About Your Church"
List of Members and Officers, 1-1-65
Photograph of 1965 Confirmation Class

In the meantime, the old bell had been removed from the 1916 church to be refurbished and electrified. So now the bell that called the worshippers to services in the 1877 country church and the 1916 town church was still calling worshippers to service.

Church Dedicated in 1966

The congregation held a brief farewell service at the old church on February 27, 1966, and drove in procession to the new church, where a brief private dedication service was held.

However, the public dedication services were not held until May 15, 1966. At this time Immanuel congregation numbered 361 baptized members and 241 communicant members.



**Fourth Church
1966-1995**

Portions of the building continue to be used today

There were three dedication services: one in the morning at which Pastor Walter J. Geffert, Immanuel's pastor from 1932 to 1943, preached; one in the afternoon at which the preacher was Northern Illinois District Vice President Herbert F. Bohlmann; one in the evening at which District President Irwin Paul preached.

Previous Church Continued to be Used

The 1916 church edifice reverted to the village, which in 1915 had given permission for its erection in the village park. It was used as a civic center until demolished in 1997.

Total cost of the new church-building, furniture, stained glass windows-was \$145,600; there were 167 individual payouts.

For the first time as far as is known, Sunday services were called off. The great blizzard of January 26, 1967, blasted the area with 30 inches of snow, piled up over 12 feet high on LaPorte Road, bringing all traffic to a halt.

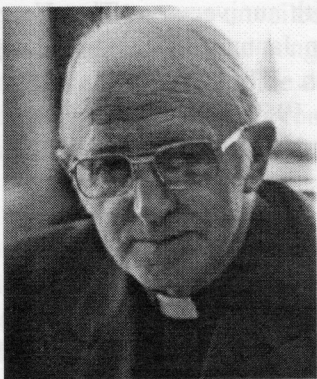
In 1964 a "Church Worker Fund" was established to help fund the education of any Immanuel member who aspired to the calling of pastor or teacher in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Stained Glass Windows Dedicated

On May 14, 1967, Immanuel's stained glass windows were dedicated in a special service. The theme of the three chancel windows is our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The triumphant Christ is above the altar, the Father Creator in the West window, and the Holy Spirit in the East window. The ten designs in the nave symbolize the "I am's" of Jesus Christ. All windows were financed by contributions from individuals and groups. The windows were designed, made, and installed by the Willet Stained Glass Studios, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, one of the world's most prestigious stained glass window makers.

Pastor Bueltmann accepted a call to the Cleveland, Ohio, Lutheran High School Association in the summer of 1967.

E. H. Albers Becomes Pastor in 1968



Rev. E. H. Albers
1968-1980

Approximately one year later Immanuel once again had a pastor. The Rev. Edgar H. Albers had accepted the call to Immanuel and was installed as pastor on July 21, 1968. During his pastorate at Immanuel, the congregation would see great growth.

On April 19, 1970, in a special afternoon service, Immanuel recognized 50 years of service as organist given by Mrs. Byron (Mabel) Nelson. A reception followed in the church hall. Mabel began playing for the congregation in 1915 at the age of 14. She took a leave of absence in 1925 and resumed playing in 1930 and served continuously since that time.

Couples Club Organized

On September 27, 1970, the newly organized Couples Club held its first meeting with fun, food, and Christian fellowship.

In May 1971 the congregation celebrated the fifth anniversary of worshipping in its new church with a special service of thanksgiving.



Organist Mabel Nelson