

Looking Back

St. Paul Lutheran Church has been a blessing in the community of Bonduel since its beginning. In 1863 Rev. Peter H. Dicke, pastor of St. Martin in Belle Plaine, came to this area and found five religious settler families. After meeting with them several times, he helped them officially organize as St. Paul Lutheran Congregation in October of 1863 and continued to serve them as pastor. A small log building was built for use as the church in 1869. From that small beginning, the congregation has grown to its present membership of over 1800 baptized members.

Pastor Dicke repeated this experience in other local areas until he was serving 14-16 locations. His workload became so great that in October of 1872, Rev. Stute was sent to his assistance, and he took over the St. Paul congregation. By the grace of God, the congregation grew rapidly under Pastor Stute's leadership. In 1878, it was decided to build a larger church, a wood frame building measuring 40 x 70 feet with a tall steeple. The congregation borrowed \$2,000 for building costs.

From the beginning, St. Paul also conducted a school. At first a member taught the children in his home. Later, school was conducted in the old log church, and the pastors were expected to teach. This changed in 1882 when St. Paul employed its first teacher at the director of Pastor Carl F. Ebert, who had come to St. Paul in 1881. He was a firm advocate for the school but had found that he could not be both pastor and teacher, since he also had other preaching stations. In 1888-89 St. Paul built a new school.

Pastor Ebert left in 1888, and Rev. Henry Rathjen accepted the call to St. Paul and stayed for 23 years until he retired. In 1889, St. Paul voted to become a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In 1892 an outdoor festival meeting place was made by clearing an area in the St. Paul forest. The church building was renovated and improved in 1904.

Rev. Martin Mueller assumed the pastorate in 1911 and lead the congregation in the significant change of enlarging the church building. This was done by constructing a basement in front of the church and moving the church onto it. A new front was added with two towers, and broad front steps led to the entrances of a narrow narthex. A chancel area was added to the rear of the building. The outside was lined with cream-colored brick, and new stained glass windows were installed. The cost was \$8,000.

When Pastor Mueller died suddenly of a heart attack in 1920, Rev. Walter J. Plischke was called. He served until he retired in 1956. In his more 35 years of service to St. Paul, many changes were made. The first English church service was conducted in 1921. The school was replaced with a much larger maroon brick building in 1925, which was later enlarged in 1954. The custom of regular Sunday service freewill offerings in addition to church dues was introduced in 1929. Almost from the beginning, church dues as a requirement for membership had been \$1 annually from each voting member (males over age 21 who requested that status). By 1916, this fee had grown to \$7 and later to \$12 in 1938.

New hymnals were purchased in 1940. In 1944 St. Paul voted to allow men and women to commune together. The practice in many Lutheran churches had been to separated males and females; this had led to the custom of males sitting on the right side and females and younger children on the left side in the sanctuary. Now most families sat together. It is important to note that under Pastor Plischke's strong leadership, St. Paul grew to become a very mission-minded congregation.

Rev. Randolph Mueller came to St. Paul in September of 1956. St. Paul had never had a Sunday School, so from his deep concern for the spiritual welfare of preschool-aged children came the establishment of a Saturday school for four and five-year-olds. In 1961 it was decided to design a new entrance to the church building. The open outside steps were removed, and a new entrance of 30 x 40 feet was added. Pastor Mueller left in the fall of 1963. St. Paul observed its 100th anniversary in October of that year.

In November of 1963 Rev. Virgil Joss accepted the call to St. Paul, and it was decided to build a new parsonage to replace the one that had been built in the late 1800s. By this time there was only one German service per month, and by 1971 that was discontinued. Voting member age was dropped to 18 but was still restricted to males. In 1968 St. Paul again built an addition to the school. Pastor Joss suffered a stroke in 1979, and he left to serve a smaller congregation in January of 1981.

Rev. Roland Golz became our pastor in November of 1981. His priorities included improving communion attendance, renewing the youth program, and offering Bible Study sessions. In 1982 women were given the right to vote and hold most offices in the congregation. Preschool for four and five-year-olds was begin in

1985, and the first Vacation Bible School was conducted in 1987. Because of the size of the congregation, it was decided in 1987 to call an associate pastor. Rev. Brent Klein was assigned this position, and he became the administrative pastor when Pastor Golz left in 1993.

St. Paul then requested the services of a vicar. Rev. Leonard Wildauer was sent in 1994, and, after having served St. Paul for a year, he was called to be our associate pastor. With the services of two pastors, St. Paul was able to increase the number of Bible study groups and enjoy better communication between pastor and member. Pastor Klein left to become a Navy chaplain in 1997, and Rev. Timothy Shoup accepted the call in 1998 to replace him.

At this time discussion centered on the need for expansion of school and church facilities. After examining various ways of meeting the needs, St. Paul decided to build a new church building with a fellowship hall connected to a four-classroom addition to the school. After a five-year campaign to raise funds for the four million dollar project, St. Paul began the building process in June of 2006. Many furnishings from the 1916 building were removed and used in the new one: the pipe organ, which was updated and enlarged, the stained glass windows, the altar, pulpit lectern, and the baptismal font. New hymnals, copyrighted 2006, were purchased by members and friends of the congregation in time for the September 30, 2007, service when St. Paul people made the transition from the 1916 to the 2007 sanctuary. The formal dedication was held on November 11, 2007.

After Pastor Wildauer left in the fall of 2008, St. Paul called Rev. Mark Palmer, who was installed as associate pastor on November 15, 2009. Throughout the years, since its beginning, St. Paul has been blessed with a succession of faithful pastors. St. Paul has been blessed with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as its core.

On this anniversary Sunday we pray, "Dear Lord, continue to bless our people and use our congregation to be a Christ-centered blessing to many others. Amen."