

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church and School

History Part II – 1903–1943

You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told. Psalm 40:5

As we begin the second chapter of St. Paul Lutheran Church's 160-year history, a new generation of St. Paul members has stepped into adult roles in the church and community. The world was venturing into the uncharted waters of a new century. Much lay in store for America and for St. Paul.

The industrial era had transformed the country into an affluent, urbanized nation. In June 1903, Ford Motor Company was founded. October of that year saw America's favorite pastime taken to a whole new level when the Boston Americans (later the Red Sox) defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates in the very first World Series.

Here at home, 1903 marked the 40th anniversary of St. Paul Lutheran Church. Rev. Heinrich Rathjen was pastor, having arrived in 1888. Worship services were still conducted in German. Surprisingly, offerings that year exceeded expenditures with a total \$2,875 in receipts and \$2,442 in expenses.

1907 brought a new congregation into Rev. Rathjen's fold when he was asked to serve Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Landstad. Emmanuel

remained under his pastoral care until the early 1940s when the congregation disbanded. Most of the members then came to St. Paul.

As St. Paul entered the second decade of the century, membership had reached over 1,000 souls. Rev. Dicke had planted, four subsequent pastors had watered, but all glory belongs to God, for it was He Who *gave the increase!* (I Cor. 3:6).

In May 1911 Rev. Martin Mueller arrived in Bonduel, replacing Pastor Rathjen who had retired earlier that year. The parsonage proved to be inadequate for Rev. Mueller, his wife, and their six children, so the congregation built a new, larger parsonage for them in 1913. That same year, St. Paul celebrated its 50th anniversary. In gratitude to God for His multiplied blessings, a special offering was collected on behalf of Concordia Teacher's College in River Forest, IL, which had recently burned down.



Rev. Mueller was instrumental in organizing a group of ladies into St. Paul's Ladies Aid in 1913. In their Spirit-inspired service to their Savior, they beautified the church property; provided flowers for the altar; cleaned the church and parsonage; organized picnics in the church grove, serving ice cream and refreshments; and they held mission festivals in the church grove, serving both dinner and supper for 25 cents a plate. When an iron fence was erected around the church and parsonage, it was paid for entirely by the Ladies Aid. Not surprisingly, they conducted their meetings in German.

1916 was a banner year for St. Paul Lutheran Church and also for the community of Bonduel. Both were facing the challenges of growth. Both would make decisions that would impact generations far into the future. In Bonduel, a group of residents petitioned the County Circuit Court to be incorporated. Census records confirmed a population of 450 persons. A land survey certified the area at 880 acres. On October 13, 1916, a special

election was held and, with a vote of 96 to 2, Bonduel was officially incorporated into a Village.

At St. Paul, the congregation was still worshipping in the 1879 wood frame church. The building itself was declared to be very sound, but it lacked room for a fellowship hall, meetings and storage space. What they needed was a basement. In 1916 work began on what would be an amazing feat of engineering. As always, men of the congregation furnished much of the labor. *He filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by any sort of workman or skilled designer. (Ex. 35:5)* They dug a basement in front of the existing building. They built the foundation out of fieldstones, hauled in from a member's farm and cemented together with \$19 worth of mortar.

For the beams, the men cut timber from the church woods. Once the basement was completed, the old building needed to be set on top of it. A team of horses was connected to the building and as they pulled it, workers placed logs beneath it to roll it forward. (The old floor had been built of solid 14" barn beams the men had cut themselves

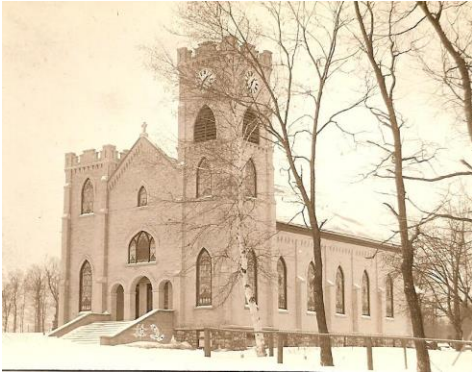


in 1879, so there was no fear that the floor wouldn't be able to withstand the operation.) As the building moved ahead, it would roll off the rear log, which would then be placed in the front. This process continued until the building safely reached its new destination.

When the building was secured on its new foundation, a new front was built on the north end featuring two towers, wide concrete steps leading to a main door, two smaller side doors, and a narrow narthex. A new chancel area and rear entrance were added to the south end of the building. The wood exterior was covered with cream-colored bricks, and elegant stained glass windows were installed. Inside the sanctuary, a balcony was constructed for the organ and choir, and brand new pews were put in place.

The chancel was adorned with a new pulpit, lectern, baptismal font and altar. Outside the building, additional work was done to the yard, horse sheds, and sidewalk along the road. To look at a picture of that beautiful church, it's hard to believe the entire project cost only \$8,000.

The building project was a remarkable achievement, a blessing from the Lord. The splendid new church, built with the labor of its members' own



hands, was dedicated in December 1916, with praise and thanksgiving to God and for the continued receiving of His gifts of the Word and sacraments. A few years later, two paintings were purchased to beautify the sanctuary and were mounted on either side of the chancel. One depicts Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying a little lamb as He leads His flock. The other portrays the resurrected Jesus with the women at

the empty tomb on the first Easter morning.

How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, ever singing Your praise! For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." Psalm 84:1,4,10.

But all was not beautiful in other parts of the world. Europe was embroiled in "the war to end all wars." Over 30 separate declarations of war had pitted fifteen nations against each other in mortal combat. Allied and German armies had been engaged in the horrors of trench warfare since 1914. According to the National WWI Museum, by the end of that year, after only five months of fighting, the number of dead and wounded exceeded four million men. America entered the war in 1917 and within a year, 2,000,000 American Expeditionary Forces were fighting in Europe.

St. Paul saw several of its own sons off to the war. One young man, E. P. Hueschen, served as a spy during the war and years later became a teacher

and principal at St. Paul School (1929 to 1946). He often brought bayonets and other war memorabilia to show his students and would fascinate them with his war stories. One story in particular is remembered to this day by a former student. It seems Mr. Hueschen was traveling alone on foot through the countryside. As night fell he had no place to sleep, and the temperature had dropped far below zero. The only warmth he could find was, of all things, a manure pile. He wrapped himself in his bedroll and spent the night on a cow dung mattress! Several years after the war, when he became St. Paul's principal, Mr. Hueschen organized the annual Armistice Day observance. The entire student body would parade to the center of town, the high school band would play, and Mr. Hueschen would give a patriotic speech. Mr. Hueschen was highly respected at St. Paul and in the community. He was a strict teacher, but he truly loved his students – and his students knew that!

World War I finally came to an end in November 1918. The death toll was estimated at 15-22 million lives. Sadly, one of them was a young man from St. Paul. Clarence G. Zernicke had entered the armed forces on July 16, 1918, and served in the Army Signal Corps. Four months later, on November 21, 1918, he died in service of his country. He was only 26 years old. He was given Christian burial in St. Paul Cemetery, and his rank and battalion were proudly inscribed on his gravestone.

*O God of love, O King of peace, Make wars throughout the world to cease;
The rage of nations now restrain: Give peace, O God, give peace again!*

While the war was ending, an epidemic was beginning. The Spanish flu had swept the world, killing an estimated 21 million people. On February 3, 1920 the Bonduel Village Board of Health closed all schools and churches and requested that parents keep their children at home. No public gatherings of any kind were allowed. Just as we did during the COVID-19 epidemic of 2020, St. Paul Lutheran Church and School were forced to close their doors. The shutdown remained in force until February 19th.

Strengthened by God's grace, Rev. Martin Mueller had faithfully shepherded the St. Paul flock since 1911. He rejoiced with them at the dedication of their new church and comforted them with God's promises through the fear and sorrow of war. In November 1920 he died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 62. He and his wife Caroline are buried in St. Paul's cemetery.

The congregation extended a call to Pastor W.J. Plischke who was serving a church in Richford, WI at the time. During his early ministry, Pastor Plischke had been a traveling missionary in Texas, establishing preaching stations in several communities. He accepted the call to St. Paul and was installed in February 1921. Pastor Plischke is remembered as being a strong preacher, adhering rigorously to the teachings of Martin Luther and rightly presenting both Law and Gospel.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Pastor Plischke initiated many changes and made significant advancements in the ministry of the St. Paul congregation. When he arrived in 1921, worship services were still conducted in German. More and more English speaking people were settling in the area, and Pastor Plischke endeavored to involve them in the work and worship of the church. Under his guidance, St. Paul began conducting English worship services once a month. Non-German residents could now hear his powerful Spirit-inspired messages of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



Pastor Plischke was the first pastor to use the media to proclaim the Gospel. He worked with the pastor of St. James Lutheran Church in Shawano to launch radio broadcasts of morning devotions and Sunday sermons. He broadcast mid-week German devotions. He submitted weekly devotional articles to the Bonduel Times, and he published the first monthly church newsletter. Pastor Plischke was truly an innovator!

1921 brought the installation of electric lights in the church. Two years later, the parsonage and teacherage were wired for electricity. These beautiful structures were sturdy and well cared for. The school on the other hand was in dire need of attention. As early as 1915 the school board recognized that the rooms were far too small, ventilation was poor, the roof needed shingling, and rooms needed to be repaired and painted. The matter was tabled and didn't come up again until 1921. By this time, there were 98 students crammed into two small classrooms. Again, no action was taken. In 1923 a committee presented the congregation with two different plans for a new school building. Opinions ran high, and there were many who opposed the new school, but after two elections, a new school was officially approved. Unfortunately, nothing was done. The project seemed to reach a dead end. Enrollment had increased to 105 students and, with the project on hold, the building continued to deteriorate.

While the building project was suspended, God led Pastor Plischke to organize St. Paul's first youth group. They called themselves the St. Paul's Young People's Society. At their meetings, English was spoken and English Bibles were used. The young people enjoyed Bible studies, fellowship, spiritual growth, and projects that supported the work of the church. In 1927, the group became affiliated with the International Walther League Society. This presented them with the opportunity to attend District and International conventions. In May 1929 the St. Paul youth hosted their first



district rally, inviting eleven other area church groups to the event. Over 400 young people attended, enjoying a day of fellowship, spiritual growth, games and athletic activities. At the end of the day, they were served an evening meal by the Ladies Aid. Though the name has changed, St. Paul's youth organization remains to this day a vibrant part of our congregation's life and purpose.

In 1924 the building project resurfaced, a building committee was organized, and plans were drawn up for a two-story brick building. The first floor had a kitchen, boiler room, restrooms and an auditorium. On the

second floor were four classrooms. Construction began the following spring. On October 25, 1925, the new St. Paul Lutheran School building was dedicated to the service and glory of the Lord. Three celebratory worship services were held, morning, afternoon and evening, with guest speakers at each one. Lunch and supper were served in the church basement at a cost of 25 cents per plate for adults and 15 cents for children.

Once the festivities were over, the next challenge was paying for the new building. The total cost had come to \$31,200, and each member was expected to pay their share. Those who had not yet contributed received visits from the finance committee members reminding them of their



obligation. Apparently that didn't do the trick, for at the April 3, 1927 voters meeting, "the secretary was instructed to write all delinquents of school building offerings that no pastoral services will be given them, even in case of death, until payment to school building fund was made." Within three months, over \$6,000 came in.

Though St. Paul continued to struggle with finances in the 1920s, other parts of the nation enjoyed prosperity and optimism. Prohibition was in force but didn't seem to dampen the exuberant lifestyles of the Roaring Twenties. In 1923 Yankee Stadium opened. In 1927 Hollywood produced the first "talkie" motion picture, *The Jazz Singer*. That same year, Charles Lindbergh made the first solo trans-Atlantic flight in his Spirit of St. Louis aircraft. And in January 1929, America was introduced to a new hero when Popeye made his debut in comic strips.

All the exuberance and optimism came to a halt on October 24, 1929, Black Thursday, when the Wall Street stock market crashed and ushered in the Great Depression of the 1930s. The financial crisis affected St. Paul as well. The congregation were mostly farmers so they had plenty of food from their gardens, clothing that the women sewed themselves, and ample firewood

from their timber. What they didn't have was money. In 1933 St. Paul was supporting a pastor and three teachers. Congregation members who were delinquent in their dues were allowed to pay in fire wood.

Hardship never seemed to daunt our forefathers. Under Pastor Plischke's guidance, mission outreach became a new focus. Led by the Lord, Pastor Plischke was a strong proponent of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. He encouraged St. Paul members to support world-wide missions and also began a mission program for the school children. In 1933 Pastor Plischke organized eighteen women of the congregation into the St. Paul Mission Circle. Their purpose was to provide financial support for mission work at home and abroad. Their first project was the purchase of an organ for the meeting room with money they raised selling their own needlework. They maintained a Birthday Fund to purchase a carpet for the church, and at Christmastime they contributed to special mission projects such as Children's Home, Flood Relief, Medical Missions, and China Relief. St. Paul Mission Circle was later affiliated with the national Lutheran Women's Missionary League. The ladies continue to serve the Lord with gladness, contributing faithfully for world-wide missions and supporting the needs of our St. Paul congregation.

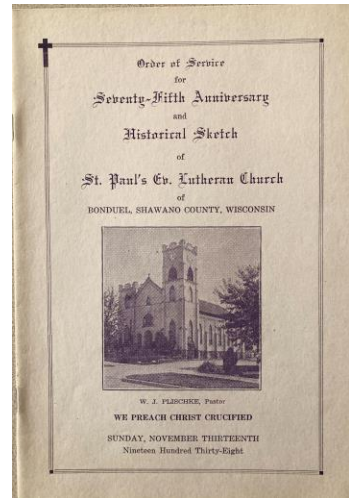


The Ladies Circle was busy raising funds also. In 1934 they purchased a new organ for the church to replace the old pump organ. Ziegfried Zastrow had been hired in 1923 to pump the old organ for \$50 a year. We're told that Ziegfried pumped the organ with one hand and held his hymnal in the other so he could robustly sing the anthems along with the congregation. (And they say men can't multitask!) Mr. Zastrow faithfully performed this duty until the new organ was installed. It was electric and his services were no longer required.

1938 marked the 75th anniversary of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. Five celebratory services were held in November to

commemorate the event. Guest pastors were brought in to speak at each of the services. Special offerings were collected for designated projects and missions, and church groups presented gifts to the congregation to beautify the altar. The Ladies Aid gave three sets of altar vestments, Mission Circle donated a chancel chair, and the Walther League gave a book desk for the altar, all to mark the festive event.

Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of Your face, who exult in Your name all the day. Psalm 89:15-16



We would be remiss if we neglected to tell the vital role music has played in the life of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. In times of highest joy or deepest sorrow, the music of the Lutheran Church has affirmed, comforted and united God's people. The Lord richly provided St. Paul with opportunities for members to learn, proclaim, and express their faith through music and song. We'll start by looking at the church band. In 1912, St. Paul teacher Ernest Boseck organized the Bonduel Church Band. They played for community events, parades, church services and festivals, and gave concerts. One hundred years later, thanks be to God, the tradition continues with the Schmidt Family Band, and St. Paul school children may also learn to play musical instrument.

St. Paul members also appreciate and excel in vocal music. Throughout the decades, St. Paul has enjoyed a variety of choirs and ensembles to enrich our worship services and enhance our celebrations, including mixed choirs, women's choirs, men's choirs, children's choirs, male quartets, female quartets, youth choirs. Luther himself said, "Next to the Word of God the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world." The Lord uses music to deliver His promises and peace into our hearts. The Words of the Lord are easily committed to memory when set to music. Pastors know. Their shut-ins

will sing hymn verses and liturgical responses when their minds recall little else. Throughout the Bible times, God's people passed on the heritage of faith in music. At St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School we are blessed by the Lord in continuing to do so!

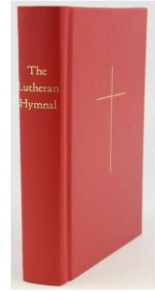
In the spring of 1938, four of St. Paul's young men, in their late teens, joined together to sing praises to God: Herbert Zuehlsdorf - 1st tenor, Martin Brodhagen - 2nd tenor, Wilmer Westphal - 1st bass, and Clarence Zernicke - 2nd bass. Their first appearance was at a Walther League event at St. Paul School. Word spread quickly, and the newly formed "St. Paul Quartet" was soon singing for rallies, anniversaries of Ladies Aid and Walther League, club meetings, weddings, funerals, the 75th anniversary of St. Paul in 1938, and of course, worship services. God's favor was certainly upon them, and before long they were invited to host a 15-minute radio broadcast on the Wausau radio station. But their ministry here at home to the people of St. Paul was especially cherished.

St. Paul has also been blessed with accomplished organists. From the early days until well into the 20th century, male teachers were required to serve as church organists and choir directors. Because of God's grace, St. Paul never lacked a skilled musician to lead their worship and praise.

In 1941, something extraordinary arrived that would change the worship life of St. Paul for the next three generations. *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Till 1941, worshippers brought their own pocket-sized German hymnals to church each Sunday. They had no music, only the text of the hymns. The new hymnal was somewhat of a shock to many of the older congregation members. First of all, it was in English and, secondly, it was much larger. The typical comment heard at the time was, "How am I supposed to get *that* in my pocket?!" But the new hymnal eventually caught on and became a beloved staple in St. Paul's life and worship for generations to

come. *I will sing my Maker's praises And in Him most joyful be, For in all things I see traces Of His tender love to me.*

Near the close of St. Paul's second forty years, the world was again at war. Though America was still a neutral nation, on December 7, 1941, 353 Japanese aircraft staged a surprise attack on the American Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Ships and aircraft were destroyed and over 2,400 military and civilian lives were lost. The next day President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his famous "Day of Infamy" speech to Congress, and war was declared on the nation of Japan.



A number of St. Paul's young men entered the Armed Forces to serve their country, several of whom had fathers who had fought in World War I. By 1942, approximately 500 Lutheran boys nationwide were drafted each week with around 300 pastors ministering to them. Here at home, the congregation worked hard to support their servicemen by raising funds for chaplains and for the distribution of Christian literature to the troops. And by praying. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives and children prayed earnestly to the Heavenly Father to protect their young men.

*O Trinity of love and pow'r, Our people shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe, Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee Glad praise from air and land and sea.*

The new century and the second forty years of our congregation's history brought many joys to the people of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School. But there were many hardships also, just as there had been for their forefathers in the previous century. *Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come.* Though change was all around, God's amazing grace never wavers. That grace had brought them to faith in Holy Baptism. That grace had kept and upheld them by His Word and Sacraments. That grace would lead them home.

Bibliography: *History of St. Paul Church* (1988), Violet Golz, Editor; *Hartland Roots* (2009), Darlene Heller, Editor; *St. Paul Lutheran Church and School - A Brief History* (2013), Marian Kupsy, Editor; *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH 2006): Hymn 751 v.1, Hymn 717 v.4; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (CPH 1941): Hymn 25, v.1; *History Part II - 1903-1943* (2023), Willa Rusch, Editor.