

# St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School

## History Part III – 1943-1983

*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 third installment of our history of St. Paul, we find our nation – our world – once again at war. The Great War, “the war to end *all* wars,” was forever renamed “World War I” and in 1939 Adolph Hitler’s army invaded Poland, launching Europe into the Second World War. The United States officially entered the conflict in 1941 after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and soon joined the Allied forces fighting in the European Theater. By the time WWII was over, 419,000 Americans would perish.

Between 1941-1945, many of St. Paul’s young men and women either joined up or were drafted into military service. Among them were Pastor Walter Plischke’s three sons, Arno, Hilbert and Walter. St. Paul School Principal E. P. Hueschen, who himself had served in WWI, sent his two sons Harold and Robert off to fight in the new war. Most of our servicemen and women returned safely to their homes and families, thanks be to God. But sadly, we also had our Gold Star boys. Roland Wegner was killed in the Battle of Cassino, Italy in November

1943. Arthur Brusewitz was killed in France in September 1944. Though war and strife had ended their earthly lives, their eternal lives were secure in the fortress of Christ’s death and resurrection, imparted to them in Holy Baptism. *Jesus lives! And now is death But the gate of life immortal; This shall calm*

*my trembling breath When I pass its gloomy portal. Faith shall cry, as fails each sense: “This shall be my confidence!”*



On the home front, the congregation posted a list of all St. Paul men and women who were serving their country. The church began displaying the American flag in the front of the church, a custom that continues to this day. Members learned to budget even the most basic of materials when rationing went into effect in

January 1942, just weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. One St. Paul member shared a few of his recollections of the rationing years: When tires were



rationed it was especially hard on farmers who couldn't buy tires for their equipment. To save tires, drivers weren't allowed to drive over 35 mph; anyone caught exceeding the limit would be fined. The gasoline ration was five gallons a week, so farmers began using horses and saved their gas rations for their cars. Sugar, coffee, meats, and all fruit except apples were rationed. Some members made maple syrup or honey, providing their products to others to substitute for

sugar. In Christ's love, the people of St. Paul faced hardships together, helping and supporting one another as they were able.

Congregational life at St. Paul saw many positive changes in the 1940s despite the war. The church and school were connected to the water main in 1941. Meaning — no more outhouses. In 1944, St. Paul voted to allow men and women to receive Holy Communion together. It had also been the practice to separate men's and women's seating, with men on one side of the church and women and small children on the other. The change in Holy Communion procedures led to families sitting together. In 1945, the church interior was redecorated and not long after, a new pipe organ was donated by Mr. Henry Dehn and dedicated to the service and glory of God.

April 1945 brought the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. President Roosevelt had guided the nation through both the Great Depression and WWII but did not live to see the end of the war. Germany surrendered in May 1945. On August 6 and 9, the United States detonated atomic bombs over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to the unconditional surrender of Japan to the Allies on August 15. The war was over! In its aftermath, over 70 million lives were lost, making WWII the deadliest war in history. Once more we prayed: *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!*

The post-war period brought growth and progress to St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church and School. Pastor Plischke, led by the Holy Spirit, encouraged the men of St. Paul to form a Men's Club in 1948. Their purpose was to lead a life of Christian stewardship, serving Christ in their daily lives, in the congregation and the church at large. The Men's Club eventually became affiliated with the Lutheran Laymen's League, helping to bring Christ to people all over the world through LLL's radio and television broadcasts. In addition to raising funds to support the outreach of LLL, the Men's Club completed a host of projects for the church and school. Some of their popular fellowship activities included ladies night, a pancake supper, the annual fish fry, card games, shuffleboard and dartball. (Incidentally, they were given permission by the voters to serve beer at their gatherings as long as they met in the school. The practice was discontinued in 1969.) Today, the Men's Club continues to play a vital role in the life and ministry of St. Paul.



Our narrative must once again be interrupted by the tragic fact of war. In June 1950 North Korean Communists invaded South Korea by crossing the 38th parallel that divided them. America immediately entered the conflict. Once again, young men and women from St. Paul were called upon to serve their country. God be praised, none of them lost their lives, and our troops returned safely to their homes.

As St. Paul moved further into the 1950s, fewer and fewer members spoke German. German worship services were reduced from weekly to bi-weekly, and finally to just once a month. The school population had grown to 165 by the mid-50s as a result of the post-war baby boom. Thanks to the God-breathed faith of St. Paul parents and their strong belief in Lutheran education, 96% of the congregation's children attended St. Paul Lutheran School! More teachers were added to the staff, and by the end of the decade St. Paul had six teachers.

With growth came overcrowding. A building fund was established and plans got underway for a new addition. The cornerstone was laid in 1951. Inside it were placed a Bible, a Lutheran hymnal, Luther's Catechism, and several other memorabilia items. The school addition was completed in 1954 and included a new office for the pastor, a modern kitchen, two restrooms on the first floor and

two classrooms on the second floor. Just as in the past, the construction work was done by members of the congregation, and lumber was cut from the church woods.



In 1956, Pastor Plischke announced he had accepted a call to Grafton WI. By God’s grace, Pastor Plischke had shepherded the St. Paul congregation and school for 35 years. He had initiated many new programs to enhance the ministry of the church, promote awareness of world-wide missions, and encourage the spiritual growth of the members. Truly God had blessed the people of St. Paul Church and School through his ministry.

With Pastor Plischke’s departure, a call was extended to Rev. Randolph Mueller of Spencer WI to be the new pastor of St. Paul. He accepted the call and was installed in September 1956. Like his predecessors, Pastor Mueller was a strong supporter of the school. He was also anxious to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the very young children of the congregation. Under God’s direction, he guided St. Paul in establishing a Saturday School for four- and five-year-olds in 1960. The program continued for twenty years, when the school began its pre-school program.



In 1961 the church building received a face lift when a new entrance was built on the front of the building. Gone were the steep, slippery, outdoor steps. The entrance was now enclosed and included a small narthex, cloak rooms and a mother’s room. During construction, worship services were held in the high school gym. Renovations were completed by December and the congregation returned to their beautiful sanctuary, joyfully dedicating the new building to the service and glory of the Lord.



To the praise of God’s glorious grace, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School rejoiced to celebrate its centennial in 1963! One hundred years of grace! One hundred years of forgiveness and salvation won for us by Christ’s death and resurrection! One hundred years of preaching and teaching God’s Word to young

and old! The congregation that began with five German immigrant families worshipping in someone's home now numbered 1,200 souls! If only Henry Burmeister, Fred Zernicke, Gottlieb Manthei, August Kallies, and Karl Stern could see it now!

On October 23, 1963, members of St. Paul celebrated in truly Lutheran fashion with four festival worship services, one of which was in German. Guest pastors were invited to preach, among them Pastor Plischke and the district president, Dr. Lloyd Goetz. Hymns, choirs, organists and trumpet filled the sanctuary with jubilant praise.

*Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices!*

It would be marvelous if days of celebration and joy could last forever. But tragedy and sorrow have a way of jolting us into the reality of our sinful condition and the anguish of our fallen world. One month after St. Paul's Centennial celebration, on November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas TX. Anyone today who lived through the 1960s will never forget that day – most can remember exactly where they were at the moment they heard the news. Two days after Kennedy's death, his assassin was murdered. These tragedies were a foretaste of the violence and hatred that would beset our nation for the next decade – explosive anti-war demonstrations, violent race riots, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

Despite the turbulence in our country during the 1960s, the people of St. Paul knew the truth of Jesus' words of warning and promise – *"I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33) Upheld by Christ's ever-present grace and promises, St. Paul Church and School could confidently face the challenges of the future.

Just prior to the centennial celebration, Pastor Mueller had accepted a call to Illinois. Within two months St. Paul extended a call to Rev. Virgil Joss of Amherst. He accepted the call and was installed in December 1963. Empowered by God, Pastor Joss would shepherd the congregation for the next 18 years.



During the 1960s, a new parsonage was built, the common communion cup was replaced by individual communion cups, a part-time secretary was added to the staff, and the first pictorial directory was made. School population was at an all-time high and, as a result, in 1968 another building extension was constructed. The addition included new offices for the pastor, principal and secretary, three new classrooms, restrooms, and a gym with shower rooms.

What was especially significant, communicant membership increased by over 200 souls, and communion attendance increased. More people were hearing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and receiving forgiveness and strength through His body and blood in the Sacrament.

Milestones were being reached elsewhere in the nation. On July 20, 1969, former naval aviator Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon. Americans everywhere sat glued to their television sets and watched as he descended a ladder from the lunar module and made his famous leap for mankind. Armstrong would later say this mission would be “a beginning of a new age.” In the next four years, ten more astronauts would become moonwalkers.

As St. Paul entered the 1970s, attendance was declining at the German worship services. The services were attended mostly by older members of the congregation. But by 1971, even they preferred the English language. German worship services were therefore discontinued.

1971 brought grief and sorrow to our congregation. For the fourth time in the century, St. Paul had seen her young people go to war. American troops had been actively fighting in Viet-Nam since 1965. As was common to all, many of St. Paul’s young men were drafted into military service during the conflict. One of the young men who served was Gary Westphal. Gary was born in 1951 and had attended St. Paul Lutheran School as a child. There are current members who knew



him as a classmate and friend. On June 13, 1971, Sgt. Gary Lee Westphal died of his wounds in South Viet-Nam. He was 19 years old. For his military service he was awarded the Purple Heart and The Air Medal. Sgt. Gary Westphal's name appears on The Wall at Panel W3, Line 74. *What though the tempests rage, Heav'n is my home; Short is my pilgrimage, Heav'n is my home; And time's wild wintry blast Soon shall be overpast; I shall reach home at last, Heav'n is my home.*

The 1970s moved forward and, always mindful of their church property, the congregation ambitiously undertook a multitude of repairs and improvements. Carpeting, organ, roof, pews, stained glass windows, driveway, sewer line, boilers - all were either replaced, repaired or updated. True to form, much of the labor for these projects was performed by St. Paul members.

Remember the bats? Anyone who sat in the St. Paul pews during the early 1970s certainly will. The bell tower was overrun by a colony of bats. Not only were they a nuisance, they were extremely annoying. The story is told of the Sunday worship service when, during Pastor Joss's sermon, a bat swooped down as if to dive-bomb him in the pulpit, narrowly missing him. It's said Pastor Joss never flinched. Went right on preaching.

In September of 1979, Pastor Joss suffered a stroke and spent several months recuperating. Principal Don Karolus assumed many of the church duties in Pastor's absence, including conducting worship services. Pastor Joss was able to return to his duties the following April. However, in December 1980 he received a call to Las Vegas, New Mexico. He was led to accept the call and left St. Paul the following month.

In August, St. Paul extended a call to Rev. Roland Golz, who was ministering in Dorchester, WI. He accepted the call and was installed in November 1981. One of Pastor Golz's priorities was encouraging Bible study groups led by lay leaders. He also re-introduced the monthly newsletter and endeavored to make every-member visits.



An extremely touchy subject had come up in the late 1970s and resurfaced in the early 1980s - women's suffrage. The issue was discussed and debated extensively, and opposition was vehement. A constitutional amendment



granting women the right to become voting members and hold certain offices was voted on and defeated. Twice. While the dispute dragged on, “a non-voters group” staged a protest by holding their offerings in a separate account to make it evident they were vital supporters of the church and worthy of a voice in its decisions. Finally in January 1982, the amendment was passed with a vote of 60 to 24. Women were now voting members of the congregation and could hold offices, with the exceptions of elder and chairman.

November 10, 1983, marked the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of Martin Luther. St. Paul arranged special events three weekends in a row to honor the great Reformer.



A movie night was held featuring the film “Where Luther Walked.” A slide show of Lutherland was given and some of Luther’s writings were presented. Festival worship services were conducted following Luther’s “Formulae Missae” (Order of Mass and Communion) and his choral work “Deutsche Messe” (German mass). Thanks be to God, 500 years after Luther’s birth, the message remains the same – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “It’s still all about Jesus.”

Martin Luther wasn’t the only one with a birthday in 1983. All glory to God, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church and School was 120 years old! One hundred twenty years of preaching Christ crucified! One hundred twenty years of God’s forgiven people gathered around His Word and Sacraments! Anchored in God’s Word, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and strengthened by His Holy Spirit, the members of St. Paul continue to “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD ... so that they should set their hope in God.” (Psalm 78:4,7)

*God’s Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever;  
To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor,  
Through life it guides our way, In death it is our stay.  
Lord grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure  
Throughout all generations.*

Bibliography: *Service Record – World War I and World War II – Bonduel and Community*, Sponsored by the Zernicke-Wegner Unit No. 217, American Legion Auxiliary; *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 Kupsky, Editor; *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH 2006): Hymn 490 v.5, Hymn 751 v.1; Hymn 895, v.1; Hymn 748, v.2; Hymn 582; *History Part III – 1943-1983* (2023), Willa Rusch, Editor.