STORIES OF WATERFORD AND ITS BUSY LIFE

ST. PETERS
GERMAN-LUTHERAN CHURCH

It was some time during the years 1857 and 1858 that the little group of people living in and near Waterford, who were of the Lutheran faith, began holding church services. Rev. Goldhammer, who was at that time pastor of St. John's Lutheran church at Burlington, occasionally came to the village and took charge of these services.

Just where the first meeting was held is not definitely known. It might have been in the home of one of the early Lutheran settlers or it might have been in the old public school building which stood where the Waterford graded school now stands. The school house is known to have been used as the regular meeting place for some time, services being held once a month.

After Rev. Goldhammer left Burlington, Rev. Titze came to St. John's. He, like his predecessor, took charge of the Waterford services. The place of meeting was changed from the school house to the Congregational church which stood where the high school building now stands. Services were held once, and frequently twice, a month, but only in the German language.

About this time, German Lutheran pastors from Milwaukee held services in the Norwegian Lutheran church at Norway Hill for the German Lutherans in that vicinity. The church building at Norway was at that time a building of logs but the message brought to the people was just as full of spiritual truth and the words sung just as inspiring to those early pioneers as messages and hymns are to the congregations in the newer and more modern churches of the present day.

No record has been left of the names of those faithful pastors who made the journey in the heat of summer and the cold of winter to bring the “Good News” to the people in a language they could understand but the influence of their work is seen even now in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

The Waterford group grew in numbers and in interest and early in the year 1863 plans were made for the erection of a church building. The fall of '63 saw the building started; the following spring saw it completed.

The lot on which the church was erected, which includes that on which the school house and the parsonage now stand, was purchased from Bemis & Witney, of Janesville, for something less than $300, it having been bought by them at one of the early Wisconsin land sales.

The church was ready for dedication in 1864 but before Rev. Titze would dedicate the church he urged the congregation to join the synod. A paragraph in the synodal constitution stated that if a pastor served a congregation for two years and at the end of that time had not convinced the congregation that it should unite with the synod, the pastor would lose his vote in that body or he would have to discontinue the services.

The Waterford congregation could not at that time see its way clear to join. Rev. Titze left compelled to discontinue his work as pastor and the church was not dedicated then as planned. This pastorless people was finally directed to Rev. Engelbrecht of Racine, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, of Missouri, Ohio, and other north-central states. He was asked to come to Waterford to take charge of the dedication of the church and other regular services.

After Rev. Engelbrecht talked the matter over with Rev. Titze, he decided to comply with the request of Valentine Young and John Ziek. The first trustees of the church were: Karl Roehn, Henry Habecost, Sr., and Karl Bucholz.

Because of a pressure of work in his church in Racine, Rev. Engelbrecht was unable to continue his work with the new church as had been planned, and the members were advised to call a pastor of their own. The question was carefully considered. The result was that in the summer of 1865 a call was sent to Rev. Edward Georgi, a student in the theological seminary at St. Louis, who accepted. To Rev. Georgi belongs the honor of being the first resident pastor of St. Peter's church. He was ordained and installed by Rev. Engelbrett, of Racine, assisted by Rev. A. Lochner, of Milwaukee, on July 23, 1865.

There was no parsonage so a house on the west side of the river was found and rented for the pastor and his family. A parochial school was opened in the fall. This was held during the winter in the pastor's home and during the warmer months in the church. This arrangement was continued until the school house was built at the rear of the church in 1872.

The parsonage was erected the second year Rev. Georgi was with the church. The house, which was improved and enlarged in 1906 or 1907, is still used as the home of the pastor of St. Peter's church. Rev. Georgi left the church in August,
1867, having served as pastor for two years.

For a period of eight months after Rev. Georgii left the congregation was without a regular pastor. Rev. E. J. Denke was called from Detroit to conduct services as often as possible. Early in the year, 1868, the church extended a call to Rev. W. Denke. The call was accepted and in January of the same year the new pastor was ordained but remained with the church less than a year. In October he accepted a call to another church.

Rev. Ermund M. W. Multanowski was Rev. Denke’s successor. His installation took place on November 24, 1869. It was during this pastorate that a number of the members severed their connection with the Lutheran church and affiliated with the German Methodistic church on the west side. This weakened the Lutheran church to some extent and after six years, during which Rev. M. A. Winters was pastor, the church entered upon a period of growth and prosperity. Many new members were added, the debts, which had been accumulating for several years, were all paid and the pastor was permitted to assist other congregations. Rev. Schneider regularly served congregations at Beloit and at East Troy. At the latter place he organized the congregation’s predecessor, Rev. M. W. Multanowski, conducted services there occasionally.

In July, 1880, Rev. Schneider was compelled to resign from his work at Waterford because of a nervous breakdown. On the seventeenth of the month he left the church he had served so faithfully, for Germany, the home of his childhood, where he sought treatment. After recovering his health he took up the study of medicine and is today a practicing physician in Milwaukee.

Rev. F. Schumann, of Freistadt, Wis., was Rev. Schneider’s successor. It was during his pastorate of nine years that the steeples were built on the church and the bell installed. There was also considerable strife and trouble in the church while he was in it and the membership decreased. He resigned in October 1889 and retired from active pastoral work.

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Rev. Albert Bartholomew of Chingo, followed Rev. Winter. He was installed pastor of this church in 1894. After four years, Rev. Bartholomew remained with this church. It was during his pastorate, in 1904, that services were first held in the English language. A change was made in the constitution of the congregation which permitted the innovation. These services were first held on Sunday mornings. Later, in keeping with the trend of the times and the demands of the younger members of the congregation, the English services took the place of the regular morning services and no other was held during the day.

While Rev. Barthing was with the church an addition to the parsonage was built; a new organ was purchased and the Ladies’ Aid Society was organized. This society has proven to be a great help to the church in many ways, one of the most noticeable being the greater care of and improvement in the church property.

In 1909 Rev. Barthing accepted a call to Laurium, Michigan and Rev. A. Lossner, of Amboy, Minn., was the next pastor to be called to the church. He accepted and presided over a large church and was installed by Pres. A. H. H. at St. Louis, on October 31, 1909. The installation service was conducted by Rev. H. G. Schmidt, of Milwaukee. Rev. Lossner was with the church for nearly eleven years when he accepted a call to the congregation at Franksville, Wis., where he is still successfully officiating as pastor.

The church was again without a regular pastor, this time for nearly three months. During that time officers and congregation were engaged in searching for the right man. At last he was found in Rev. A. J. Schulz, who was installed by Pres. A. H. H. at St. Louis, on October 19, 1929.

The choice of the church was admirable and qualified in every way for the work of this parish. He is the son of Carl and Augusta Burmeister Schulz. His birthplace was at Parkston, S. D., on a farm. He attended the public school and when fifteen years of age was confirmed. After completing his high school work he entered the college at Springfield, Ill. Three years were spent in special preparation for the ministry. In July 1915 Rev. Schulz entered upon his life work as pastor of a church at Frankslake, Saskatchewan, Canada, about twenty miles northeast of Regina. On May 10, 1918, he was united in marriage with Miss Selma Schuetz, at Cess, Wis., and the new home became a center of religious life and activity. A little son, Gerhard, born in August, 1919, remained with them less than a year. A little daughter, Ruth, now two and one-half years of age born in Waterford is making the home life of Rev. and Mrs. Schulz.

Rev. Schulz was compelled to give up his pastorate in Canada because of illness brought on by overwork and an attack of influenzus, when on the advice of his physicians he took manual labor until health returned and he was able to go on with his chosen work when he accepted the call to the field he is now filling so acceptably.

Since the years 1892 and 1924 several hundred and seventy-seven have been confirmed by the pastor of St. Peter’s church. There have been six hundred and ninety-two baptisms; one hundred and seventy-six marriages and two hundred and thirteen burials. The membership now numbers sixty-eight voting members; about two hundred and thirty communicant members and about two hundred and ninety including men, women and children. Between thirty and fifty school children are registered in the Saturday morning school each year.

Since 1920 alternate services in English and German have been held. A school house which still stands was erected in 1872. For a number of years a regular parochial school was maintained with Rev. Schulz as teacher or the pastor of the church serving as instructor. This was given up a number of years ago. The religious instruction of the young people is not neglected, however, as a church school is held on Saturday forenoons, regularly conducted by the pastor. The children are carefully instructed in the Bible, the catechism, church history, and church music. The Saturday school is proving to be not only interesting but profitable. The young people are developing strong Christian characters and are gaining a much greater knowledge of the beliefs and doctrines of the church than they could possibly gain in an hour’s work in a school on Sunday.

The officers at the present time are: President, Herman Schunk, vice-president, A. J. Schulz; elders, August Raseman, W. G. Plass, Fred Habe- 
cost; treasurer, Rudolph Neubauer, Thomas Paulson; secretary, Miss Eunice Habeck; janitor, Julius Nehls.