

# THE PILGRIMAGE CONTINUES

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL AT 150

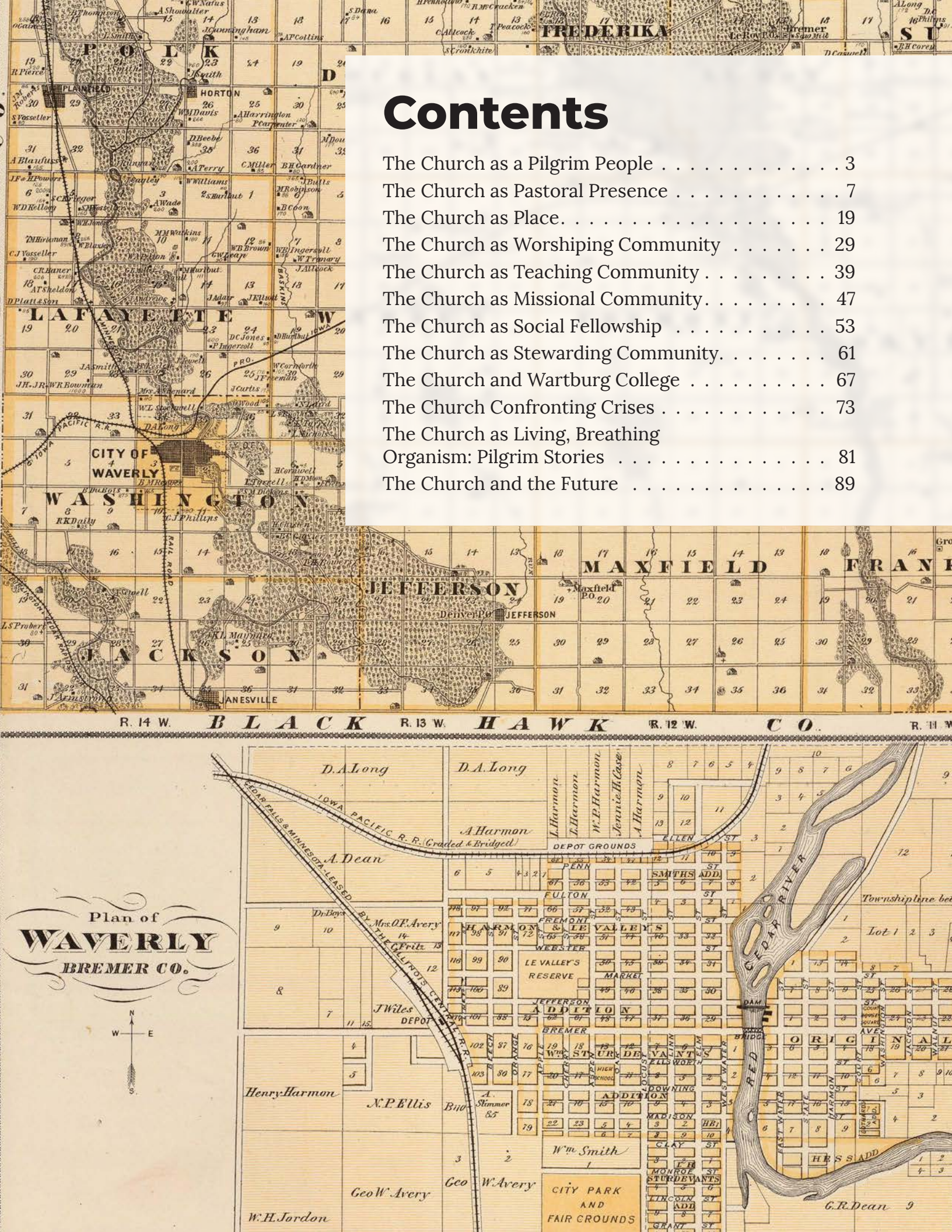


A topical history of an  
historic Christian congregation

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with contributions from Linda Moeller





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## CHAPTER 1

# The Church as a Pilgrim People

### European prelude

The origins of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church of Waverly, Iowa, lie in the rich rural farmlands of Nineteenth Century north-central Europe. What was to become a unified nation after 1870 was in previous decades a collection of independent German principalities and imperial free cities. The lands where Martin Luther’s reform of the Western Christian Church took root had, after three-hundred years, nurtured hundreds of thousands of Volkskirche, parishes populated with pious Lutheran farm and village folk.

While the urban areas of Europe had already begun to change, under the influence of the intellectual Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the rural peasantry continued to hold fast to more traditional expressions of Lutheran Christianity. It was from among these rural and small-town folk, many of whom cherished the Lutheranism of their ancestors, that there arose

a fever for migration to new opportunities on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Among the thousands of German Lutherans who relocated to North America, a significant number came pouring into what was to become Bremer County, Iowa. By the 1860s and 1870s, this trickle became a river and then a flood.

Among the first Lutherans to organize a congregation in Bremer County were the sturdy folk who took up farming in the district that came to be known as Maxfield Township, midway between present-day Readlyn and Denver. The fledgling St. John Lutheran congregation eventually became the “mother church” for most of the German Lutheran parishes eventually organized in Bremer County, including St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Waverly. Zealous pastoral leadership at Maxfield accounted for the success of this effort.



## A rejected invitation and a turn in the road

History is sometimes determined by accidents.

The members of St. John Maxfield Township were looking for a spiritual leader. Having been served briefly by LCMS (Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod) clergymen, they issued a call to still another Missouri Synod pastor. The individual in question, his name lost to history, turned them down. That left the solidly German parish with one viable option. They called a pastor affiliated with the recently-organized Iowa Synod. He accepted their invitation.

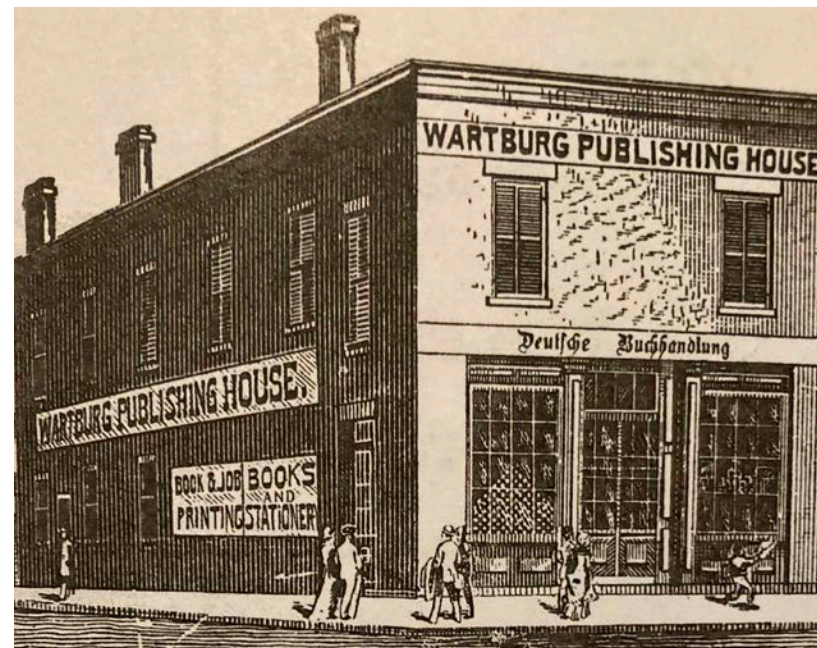
It is interesting to speculate what might have resulted, had the congregations fostered by the Maxfield church – in communities including Sumner, Tripoli, Readlyn and Waverly – become affiliated with LCMS. Loyalties would doubtless have turned toward St. Louis, Missouri. Bremer County Lutheranism would have become a distant outpost of a denomination headquartered hundreds of miles to the south.

Instead, Waverly became, for a season, the nerve center of the rapidly-growing Lutheran Synod of Iowa and Other States. In time the city

## Precarious beginnings

In its infancy, St. Paul's Lutheran Church gave little sign of becoming the large and thriving parish into which it eventually grew. The German Lutheran families steadily moving into the growing farm-to-market town, along with those cultivating acreages in the surrounding countryside, were greeted by a population already in place. English-speaking congregations included Presbyterian, Universalist, Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal and Baptist.

As with other non-English-speaking arrivals on the American scene, the German Lutherans were misfits. Language tended to set them apart from their neighbors, a situation not to change significantly until the First World War began to force assimilation. Consequently, Lutherans in



*With the Iowa Lutheran Synod having made Waverly its administrative center, a publishing ministry, Wartburg Publishing House, was operated until 1912 in a building directly across the street from what is now the Bremer County Museum. (This site is now an open-air memorial to Veterans.)*

became the seat of a Lutheran college, a Lutheran insurance society, a Lutheran publishing house, a Lutheran children's home, a Lutheran care center for senior citizens, a Lutheran parish school – and, in time, one of the flagship Lutheran congregations of the synod.

Waverly functioned at the outset on a parallel but separate track from the wider community.

At first a tiny fellowship, the community that became St. Paul's had few resources. Their first priority became a dwelling for a resident pastor and a space for a parish school. The earliest parsonage was on Waverly's east side, just east of the county court house. The first classes for students seem to have been held in this residence.

With no funds for the construction or purchase of a worship facility, members first met in a commercial building near the Cedar River on the west side of the bridge. Securing sufficient funds through contributions, in order to purchase a pastor's home, pay a meager part-time salary, and satisfy the rent on a worship space,

proved challenging. Members, however, rose to the task.

While there was limited interaction with members of other denominations, the fledgling congregation instead found itself in serious conflict with other Lutherans, specifically clergy and lay members of the LCMS. The Missourians drew early financial and moral support from an energetic pastor located in Neuendettelsau, Germany. Wilhelm Loehe became a cheerleader for North American Lutheranism in the Midwest by sending young pastors from Germany to provide leadership for congregations needing pastoral leadership. At first, the LCMS worked closely with Loehe but, in time, there was a serious falling out. Their trust of Loehe and his initiative nearly evaporated.

Realizing that his efforts with the LCMS were being stifled, Loehe turned instead to supporting certain pioneer pastors in Michigan who were more attuned to his program. Two such clergymen, experiencing conflict with Missouri clergy in Saginaw, Michigan, relocated to Dubuque and

## From modest to massive

From the start, St. Paul's was unable to provide sufficient financial support in order to salary a pastor. Creative solutions were sought, including pairing the pastor's duties with that of teacher and director of the congregation's parish school, a teaching ministry that was organized almost from the beginning. [A review of the ministry of St. Paul's Lutheran School appears in chapter 5.] At one point, pastoral leadership was provided by an individual also serving as professor at Waverly's newly-organized Wartburg Normal School, later renamed Wartburg College. [A summary of the congregation's relationship to and partnership with Wartburg appears in chapter 9.]

As the number of German Lutherans increased, St. Paul's membership began to swell. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the congregation found it both necessary and possible to construct a large worship center, sufficient to seat several hundred members. In spite of a short-lived movement toward demolishing

then Strawberry Point, Iowa. They organized what became the Iowa Synod and its theological school, Wartburg Seminary. One of these church planters, Georg Grossmann, eventually arrived in Waverly, where he was instrumental in helping to found what became Wartburg College. When Grossmann was elected president of the Iowa Synod, Waverly became its de-facto headquarters until his death, many years later. (Grossmann is buried in Harlington Cemetery.)

Following their rejection of Loehe's program, members of LCMS vilified all of his followers, and their newly-formed Iowa Synod, which they considered to be an example of "inauthentic Lutheranism." That stance also shaped the attitudes and behavior of LCMS clergy and church members in Bremer County. Such opposition was to plague St. Paul's congregation in its first decades. [An early example of LCMS meddling in the early life of St. Paul's Church is described in the congregation's first crisis-driven schism, detailed in chapter 10.]

and replacing this structure in the 1960s, this facility continues in use today. [A discussion of buildings constructed to serve St. Paul's appears in chapter 3.]

With the rapid growth of the congregation came opportunity and challenge. Expanding from a neighborhood-sized to a metropolitan-sized faith community, the congregational budget eventually grew to over two-million dollars per year. At times, financial support sufficient to justify needed spending proved difficult.

The parish eventually found itself able to call two pastors and, eventually, three. [A listing of called clergy appears in chapter 2.] St. Paul's became a magnet for leading citizens of the city – drawn notably from among those working in the business community, and specifically from among leaders of Lutheran Mutual Life Insurance Company (now CUNA Mutual), the Lutheran Children's Home (now Bremwood) and staff and faculty of Wartburg College.



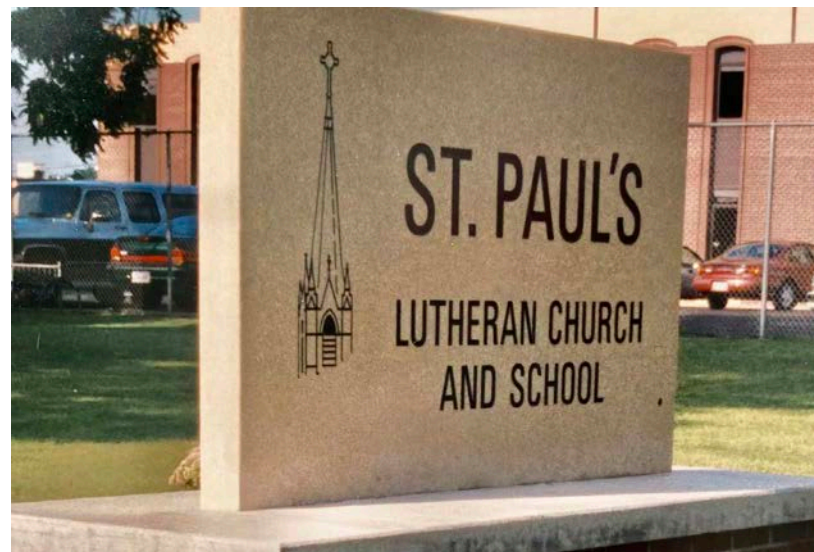
## A Pilgrim People

Individuals and families affiliate themselves with church communities for one or more of a variety of reasons – a seeking after meaning and belonging; a desire for fellowship with the like-minded; a pious desire to connect with the Almighty through worship and prayer; a place to find fellowship opportunities for children and youth; a place to become further educated in the promises and convictions of a faith community; a place to be equipped for discipleship and service; and, even, a wish to enhance one's financial success in the wider community, or one's standing in a given social circle.

Members of a faith community need to examine their reasons for belonging, and to ask themselves whether their membership embraces the example and witness of Jesus. At its best, a family of faith becomes or grows into a pilgrim people, committed to the radical claims of the gospel. St. Paul's has nurtured this commitment, sometimes fervently and successfully, sometimes not so passionately, over the space of 150 years.

St. Paul's has succeeded, over these past fifteen decades, in living out Christ's mission in a variety of ways, notably:

- By providing, through worship, vital engagement with the promises of God;
- By organizing and supporting, sometimes at great financial sacrifice, a parish school currently serving children from pre-school through grade 6;
- By cultivating a deep and lasting partnership with Wartburg College;
- By confronting hard truths through study, debate and principled action;
- By engaging with the wider community through parish programs and also through the lives, service and example of its members;
- By reaching out to the world beyond the congregation with on-going support for ministries including Bremwood, Lutheran



World Action, Lutheran World Relief, ELCA Hunger Appeal, Lutheran Immigration and Rescue Service – and myriad “non-church” benevolent causes supported independently by members of the congregation.

The call to any Pilgrim People, a message also heard by members of St. Paul's Church, is summarized by the Prophet Micah: “Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.” When not distracted by self-interest, tunnel vision or lack of will, members of St. Paul's Church have been poster children for this clarion call, sounded so clearly in the Hebrew Scriptures.

At its best and worst, a living congregation, such as St. Paul's, functions as a Pilgrim People. It moves as a community of faith, toward a future filled with hope, its members inspiring one another to lives of love, service, justice and peace. A prayer from the church's current worship book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, best summarizes the opportunities and challenges of a Pilgrim People. It describes St. Paul's own pilgrimage:

*O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus the Christ, who is our Lord.*

## CHAPTER 2

# The Church as Pastoral Presence

### Fifteen Decades of Pastoral Leadership

Titles can be revealing. Roman Catholics refer to their parish leader as Priest/Father. For Episcopalians, the term is Rector. United Methodists are led by Elders. Most mainline Protestants prefer the term Minister. For fundamentalists, it's often Brother.

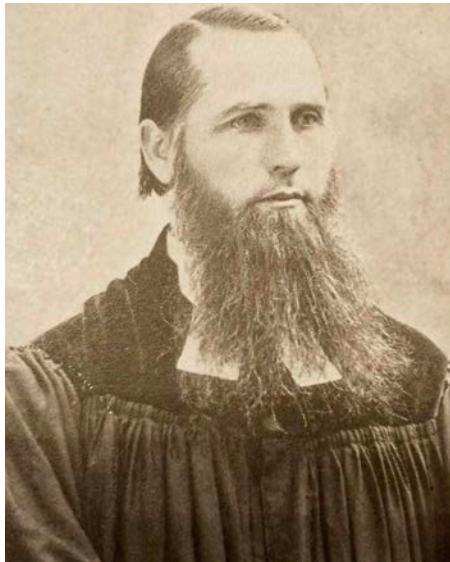
Lutherans may be alone in identifying their clergy with the title Pastor. The implication is that ordained leaders in the Lutheran tradition provide leadership by example, with informed guidance and with a pace both firm and gentle.

(This describes the ideal Lutheran pastor; there are always unfortunate exceptions.)

St. Paul's congregation has been uncommonly blessed with fifteen generations of exemplary pastoral leadership. The character of each individual called to ministry at St. Paul's has been unique. All have been effective according to their peculiar gifts. All have been servant leaders.

As of this writing, 36 clergy have led St. Paul's congregation – 32 men and 4 women. Their names and singular contributions appear below.





## Paul Bredow

1872

Although his call was to serve St. John, Maxfield Township, Denver, Iowa, Pastor Bredow was the first clergyperson to lead worship among Lutherans in Waverly. He presided over the organizational meeting for St. Paul's (May 9, 1872). He nurtured St. Paul's congregation into life, along with several other parishes in Bremer County.

## M. Gerlach

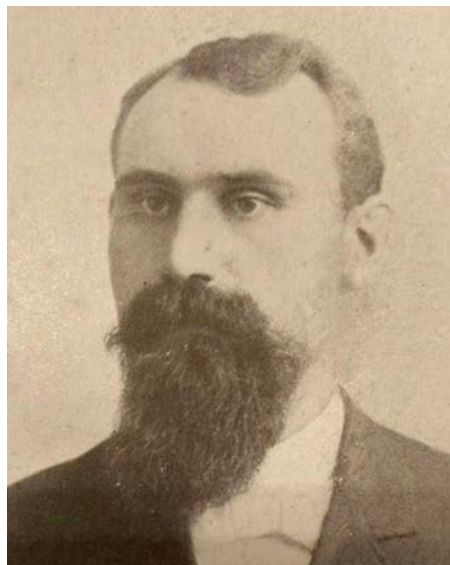
1872–1876

Gerlach was St. Paul's first called pastor. He prepared the first confirmation class, numbering 16 youth. Sadly, he was caught in the middle of an unfortunate controversy that resulted in a split of the already-small membership. The result was, for a time, two Lutheran parishes in Waverly. Although most of the dissidents eventually returned and the breakaway church shut down, by then Pastor Gerlach had departed.

## A precarious decade of instability

1876–1886

Over the next ten years, in rapid succession, five pastors served the fledgling congregation. They were M. Eberhard, D.M. Ficken, the Rev. Mr. Sommerfeld, E. Eichler and F. Lutz. The last two named shared their parish leadership time with their duties as professors at nearby Wartburg College. For at least one full year during the decade, the congregation had no regular pastoral leadership at all.



## F. Zimmermann

1886–1903

It would be fair to say that Pastor Zimmerman's ministry at St. Paul's was transformative. He was clearly a charismatic and visionary leader. During his tenure the congregation finally found its footing, acquired its first permanent worship space and began what can only be described as dramatic growth in baptized membership. Zimmerman was instrumental in leading the congregation to purchase and then expand an abandoned church building vacated by a defunct Universalist congregation.

## John Weyrauch

1903–1908

Pastor Weyrauch inherited the enviable upward growth trajectory begun during Pastor Zimmermann's tenure. The congregation was rapidly outgrowing its already-expanded worship facility. Weyrauch led the effort to raise funds – \$32,500, a princely sum in those days – for the construction of the 700-seat German gothic structure in which St. Paul's congregation still worships.

## Emil Rausch

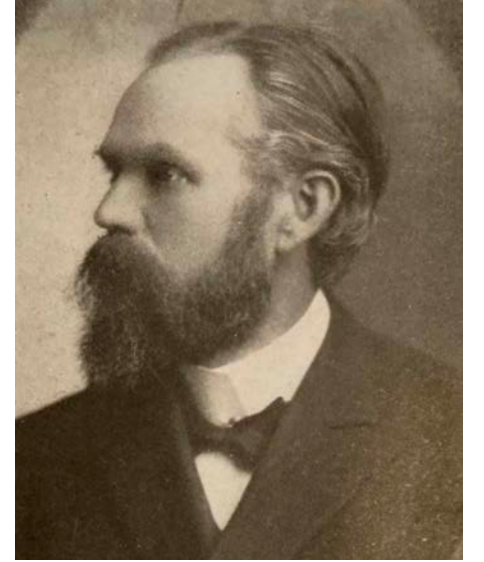
1908–1932

Pastor Rausch was a stellar churchman. He oversaw the liquidation of the remaining debt on the new church building; guided the congregation out of an all-German language milieu by introducing English-language worship; was instrumental in bringing two national conventions of the Iowa Synod to St. Paul's (1910, 1920), served for a time as president of the Iowa District; and edited the synod's churchwide English-language publication. Having what was to become the longest ministerial tenure of any pastor serving St. Paul's (24 years), he left the congregation to become president of Wartburg Theological Seminary.

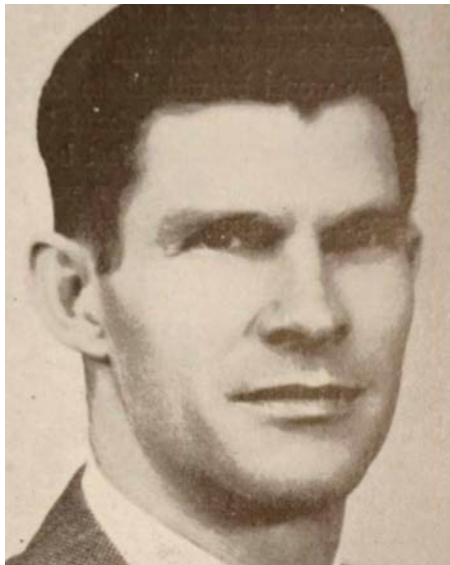
## Roland Schlueter

1932–1943

If any clergyman may be said to have facilitated the permanent establishment of Wartburg College in Waverly, it would be Pastor Schlueter. He and key lay members of St. Paul's congregation sprang into action when, in 1932, the newly-formed American Lutheran Church, reeling from the effects of a crippling financial depression, voted to merge the two Wartburg Colleges – campuses at Waverly and Clinton – and locate the new entity in Clinton. Schlueter and members of his congregation convinced the leadership of the ALC to hold the 1934 national convention in Waverly. Meeting in the pews of St. Paul's, the delegates voted to reverse course and relocate the Clinton school in Waverly. While it was not obvious at the time, Waverly would prove to be a permanent home for the college, arguably Pastor Schlueter's enduring legacy.







### Otto Fangmeyer

1941–1948

During his first two years in Waverly, Pastor Fangmeyer served on a team with Pastor Schlueter in the first-ever dual ministry configuration at St. Paul's. After Schlueter's departure, Fangmeyer soldiered on without a clergy partner, administering a growing parish of more than 2,200 baptized members. With Pastor Schlueter, he was instrumental in guiding to completion the construction of the parish house.

### William Schmidt

1948–1963

A former college president (St. Paul-Luther College), Pastor Schmidt came to St. Paul's with sterling leadership credentials. During his tenure four additional clergy were called, consecutively, to serve with him (see listings below). Schmidt inherited the dubious distinction of being only one of two pastors at St. Paul's to experience a level of conflict that led to a division of the membership. The very good problem, that of too many members for the sanctuary to accommodate, along with a deterioration of physical space, resulted in conflict and headaches for Schmidt and his pastoral staff. He brought forth a proposal to abandon the gothic nave, construct a new building and close the parish school. These ideas were defeated by voters, but the result was the departure of a significant number of members who then organized Redeemer Lutheran Church, on Waverly's west side. Pastor Schmidt resigned shortly thereafter. (This conflict is detailed in chapter 10.)

### Dean Kilgust

1951–1952

Pastor Kilgust was called to serve with Pastor Schmidt, filling the role of Parish Minister. One year later he received and accepted a call to serve a congregation in Wisconsin.



### William Weiblen

1953–1958

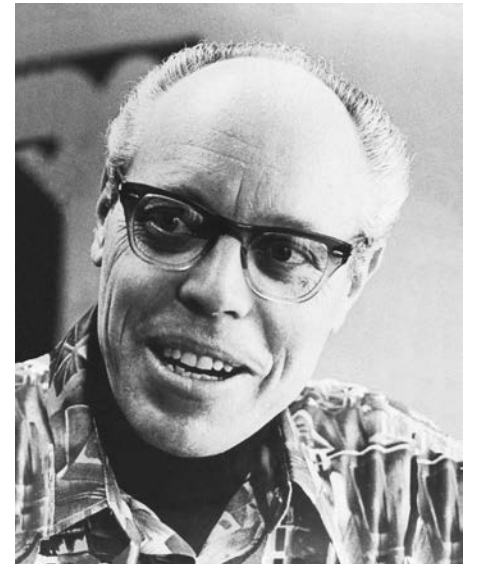
In search of a replacement for Kilgust in the Parish Minister role, St. Paul's called William Weiblen. Academically ambitious, he sought and received a one-year leave to study in Germany. After his return to St. Paul's, he requested a second leave to complete a doctorate in theology, also in Germany. After returning to St. Paul's for the second time, he soon accepted a call to serve on the faculty of Wartburg Seminary.



### Herman Diers

1959–1970

For generations it had been the practice of Wartburg College students to walk the six blocks from campus to Sunday worship at St. Paul's. In 1958 the college established a campus congregation. Diers was called by St. Paul's and deployed to lead worship for the Wartburg students. This was a unique arrangement that did not continue for the long term, since the campus congregation eventually diminished and ceased to function. Diers continued thereafter as a faculty member at Wartburg.



### Gerald Neurenhausen

1959–1961

Pastor Neurenhausen accepted a call to St. Paul's to continue the work begun by Pastor Weiblen. His service in Waverly was brief. He departed after two years.







### **Glen Gronlund**

1962–1968

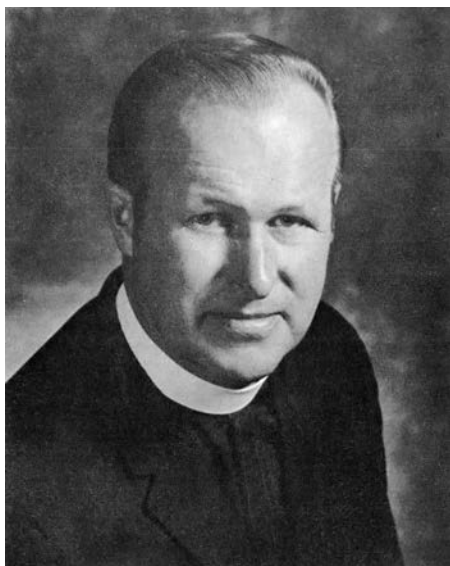
The multi-pastor configuration was continued when Pastor Gronlund was called to serve as an assistant to Pastor Schmidt. Gronlund arrived in the midst of the strife that led to a division of the congregation. A year after his arrival, when Schmidt resigned, Gronlund became senior pastor. He inherited the unenviable task of trying to bring healing to a badly-shaken congregation, an assignment he carried out with considerable success. Early in his ministry at St. Paul's a spacious new building for the day school was constructed and dedicated. During his tenure, two other clergy were also called to serve with him.



### **Richard Rehfeldt**

1964–1969

Pastor Rehfeldt came to St. Paul's as a newly-graduated seminary student. He served on the pastoral team with Glen Gronlund for five years and with Wayne Stumme for three.



### **Wayne Stumme**

1966–1968

Pastor Stumme served briefly with pastors Gronlund and Rehfeldt, the first time a three-pastor configuration functioned at St. Paul's. After two years Pastor Stumme fulfilled a desire to serve in urban ministry, accepting a call to a parish in Waterloo.

### **Durwood Buchheim**

1968-1973

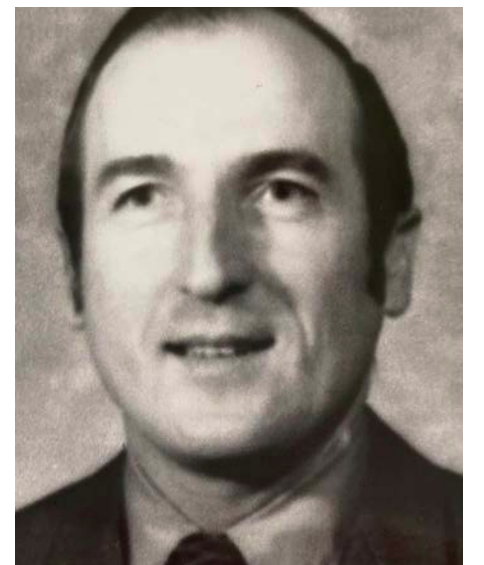
Pastor Buchheim arrived at St. Paul's in the midst of a seemingly never-ending debate about what to do with the worship space – the same discussion that had led to division and loss of members during Pastor Schmidt's tenure. Buchheim made it clear that the sanctuary should either be replaced or refurbished. The congregation approved the second option. He departed St. Paul's to join the bishop's staff in Des Moines, and was eventually elevated to the role of bishop himself.



### **George Hanusa**

1968–1976

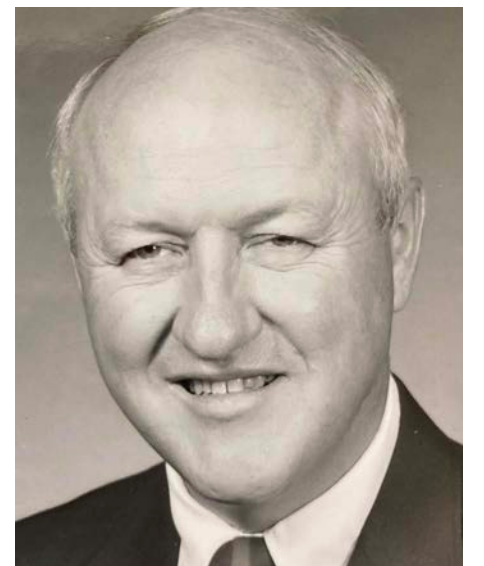
Pastor Hanusa served with Pastor Buchheim, forging a bond that later resulted in his serving with him in the bishop's office in Des Moines. At St. Paul's he distinguished himself as a clergyman who reached into the wider community, notably with programs developed for the youth of Waverly.



### **Larry Trachte**

1970–1971

Like Pastor Diers before him, Pastor Trachte's service to St. Paul's was brief. Like Pastor Diers, he transitioned from the congregation to Wartburg College where he became campus chaplain, a role in which he served with compassion, insight and distinction until his retirement four decades later. He has always remained a member of St. Paul's congregation.



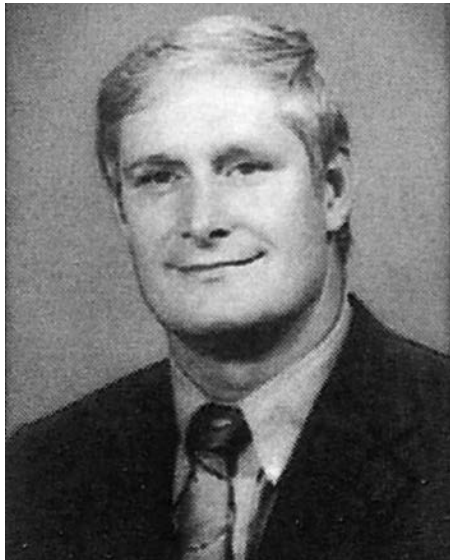




## L. David Brown

1973–1979

Pastor Brown came to St. Paul's having held high office in The American Lutheran Church. He led the Division for Youth Ministry for a dozen years before coming to Waverly. Pastors Wheeler and Solberg (see below) shared ministry tasks with Brown, who made the unusual promise to visit every member home in the congregation, a promise he and his wife, Virginia, fulfilled. Brown was committed to justice and hunger issues, having visited some of the most poverty-stricken urban areas in India. This emphasis marked his ministry in Waverly. He departed to serve as bishop of the Iowa District (succeeding Durwood Buchheim), and then as the first bishop of the Northeast Iowa Synod, with its offices newly-established in Waverly.

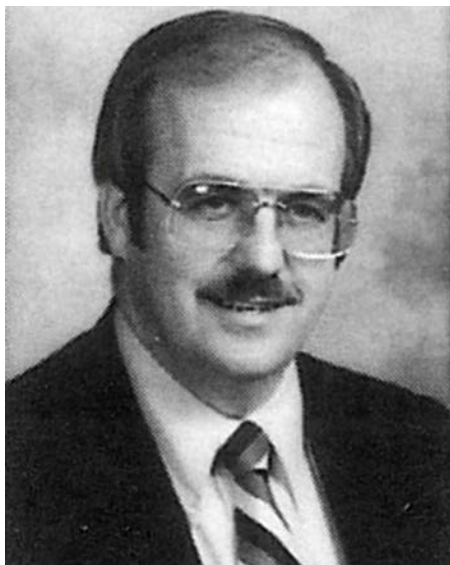


## Glen Wheeler

1975–1994

Pastor Wheeler completed one of the longest ministry tenures in the history of St. Paul's Church. During his 19 years on staff, he became a champion for youth ministry and, at one point, served as chair of the board of directors for EWALU, the ALC church camp at Strawberry Point. In the midst of a difficult divorce, he received support and care from the church community. In time, he remarried, choosing as his wife a teacher at St. Paul's Lutheran School.

Reflecting on the team ministry into which he entered, Wheeler shared this observation: "Some people thought Pastor Brown had lost his mind to be an advocate for team ministry that involved three co-equal pastors with no adjectives attached to our names except "Pastor." Hierarchical people do not believe that this can work, but during my entire time [at St. Paul's] with multiple team partners, it did work."



## David Solberg

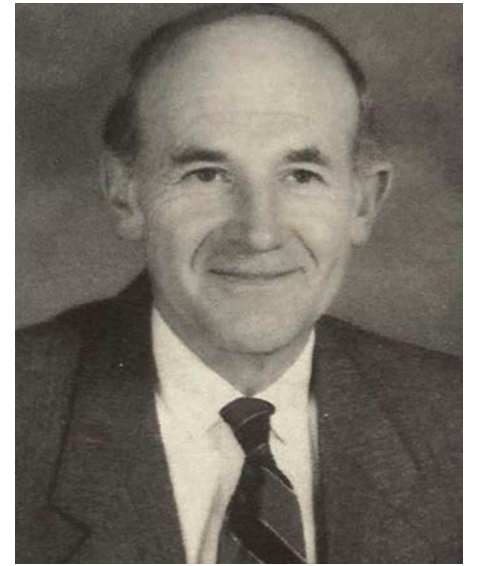
1977–1984

Pastor Solberg served in a three-clergy ministry with pastors Brown and Wheeler. When Brown departed, Pastors Wheeler and Dickman joined with Solberg in restoring the staff to a three-person configuration. Pastor Solberg left St. Paul's to serve on the staff of Wartburg Seminary.

## Dennis Dickman

1980–1997

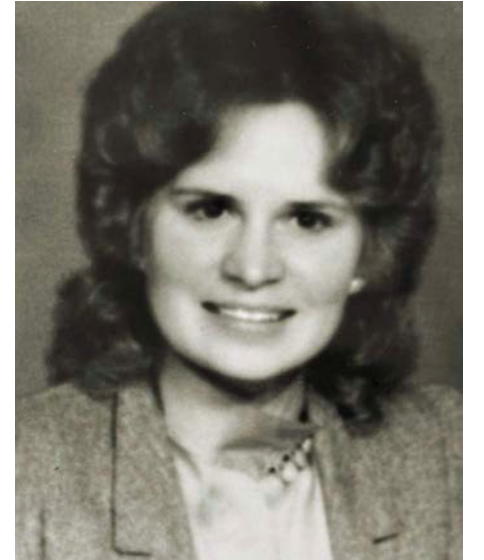
Like Pastor Wheeler, Dennis Dickman served St. Paul's for 17 years. He brought with him a deep love for scholarship and led members of the congregation into theological reflection and study. An adult series which he led was designed to unpack the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. It resulted in a class that became extremely popular, eventually enrolling well over 100 adults. [More about Dickman's adult series appears in chapter 5.]



## Evon Flesberg

1985–1990

Pastor Flesberg has the distinction of having served as the first female clergyperson at St. Paul's. The ALC had voted to permit this possibility in the 1970s, but women clergy were slow to find opportunities to serve in congregations. St. Paul's received Pastor Flesberg with grace and enthusiasm. She served on the three-pastor team for five years.



## Debra von Fischer

1991–1995

Pastor von Fischer's ministry continued the pattern of including a female on the pastoral staff. She offered a special interest in ministry to children and youth and introduced Sunday morning children's sermons during worship. Four years after arrival in Waverly, she accepted a call to a congregation in Atlanta, Georgia.







**Michael Burk**

1994–2001

Pastor Burk arrived to fill a vacancy created with the departure of Pastor Wheeler. It was a third career choice for the Wartburg College and Seminary graduate. Previously a high school teacher and then an employee at Lutheran Mutual Life Insurance, Burk joined the ministry team, serving with Pastors Dickman and von Fischer. When Dickman departed, Burk became lead pastor. His eagerness to engage members in dialog led, during his tenure, to the establishment of Sunday morning forums, at which members could ask any questions they liked. Said Burk, "I thrived in this kind of give and take. I think it added trust, especially when changes were on the horizon." After a creative ministry in Waverly, he accepted a call to serve on the worship team at the churchwide offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Chicago, and was instrumental in helping to create ELCA's worship resource, Evangelical Lutheran Worship. After his service there, he was elected bishop of the ELCA's Southeast Iowa Synod, which he led until retirement.

**Joyce Sandberg**

1996–2016

With her arrival in Waverly, Pastor Sandberg became the third female to provide pastoral leadership at St. Paul's. Her tenure was marked by creative preaching and a fetching sense of humor. During 2001, when both pastors Burk and Armstrong departed, Pastor Sandberg found herself for a time as solo clergyperson serving a congregation of nearly 2,000 members. (She was, however, assisted by interims until Pastor Schneider's arrival.) During her tenure, following action by an ELCA assembly permitting it, the first marriage service for a same-gender couple was performed.

**Kathleen Hesterberg Armstrong**

1998–2001

When Pastor Hesterberg (who married while at St. Paul's and became Kathleen Armstrong) accepted a call to St. Paul's Church, the pastoral staff became, for the final time, a three-person team. During her tenure, she focused her ministry on working with the youth of the congregation. She departed in order to pursue advanced academic study.



**Curt Schneider**

2002–2015

Along with Pastor Sandberg, Curt Schneider experienced a ministry highlighted by two memorable events. In 2008, the last in a series of serious Cedar River floods to inundate St. Paul's campus filled the basements of the church, the Parish Hall and the school. The water spread to forty blocks, approaching the campus of Wartburg College. (Subsequent City Council action resulted in the construction of a deflatable river dam, which will most likely eliminate any future such catastrophes).

The second noteworthy event was the dedication of an ambitious Narthex Annex connecting the sanctuary, the Parish Hall and the school. Of special significance was the purchase by the congregation of a one-block-length of city street on which the structure was partially built, and the decision to construct the new building well above the level of river flood.

More than any other pastor ever to serve St. Paul's, Pastor Schneider had the uncanny ability to remember names of members of the congregation, including those of very young children. He would routinely address youngsters by name during his Sunday morning children's messages. Occasionally members were heard to murmur the question, "How does he do that?"

**Patricia Shaw**

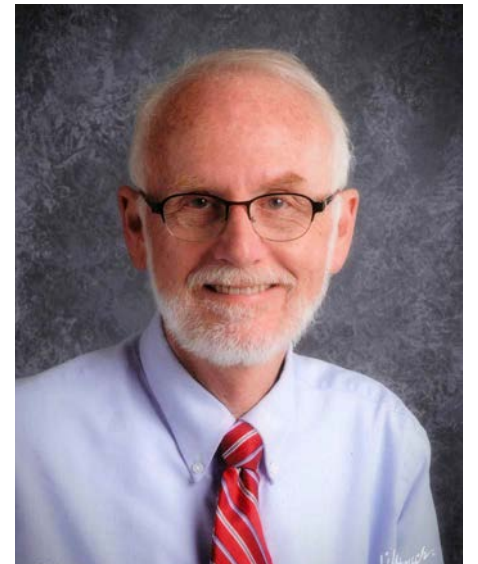
2016-Current (interim assoc., part-time visitation)

Pastor Shaw joined with Pastor Sandberg to expand the ministry team after Pastor Schneider's departure. Although already officially retired, she was invited to serve as interim associate pastor at St. Paul's. She accepted a part-time contract, serving in a variety of roles until Pastor Sandberg's departure. Since 2017 she has served as visitation pastor, a role in which she functioned during all of Pastor Bergren's tenure, and which continues during the leadership of Pastor Anderson.

**Arthur Bergren**

2016–2021

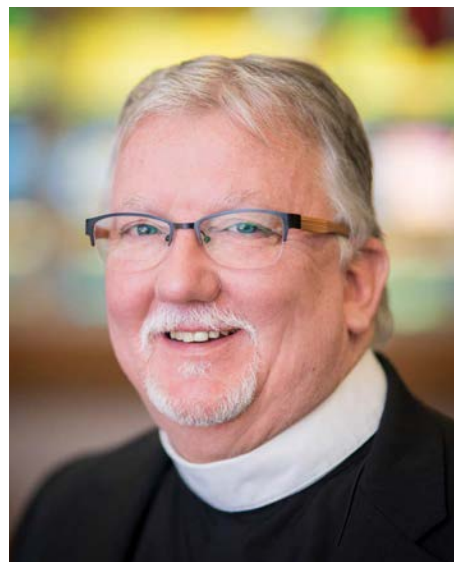
Pastor Bergren accepted the call to St. Paul's Church following the retirement of Pastor Schneider. (Pastor Joyce Sandberg agreed to remain for a transitional year, helping the new pastor find his footing, before she also retired.) Previously a member of a





bishop's staff in northern Illinois, followed by pastorates in Illinois and Wisconsin, Pastor Bergren established the practice of inviting retired clergy within the congregation to serve as "preaching pastors." Faced with retiring a large debt following construction of the \$3.5 million Narthex Annex, he spearheaded the effort that led to liquidating the entire deficit. He also led a "re-branding" effort tying together the church and school, changing the label to "St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School". Four years into his tenure, a world-wide pandemic enveloped the globe, impacting every aspect of public life. Bergren inherited the unenviable task of leading St. Paul's through this challenging time, which involved serious adjustments to worship life and the operation of the parish school. (As of this writing, the pandemic is still in our midst.)

The challenge of coping with this pandemic included a range of remedial measures, starting with a closure of the facility and providing an online worship forum, and transitioned to urging the wearing of face masks, getting vaccinated when it became available, and social separation while attending worship and in school classrooms. These measures were not readily accepted by all. They became politicized at the national, state, and local levels, including at St. Paul's, especially with a vocal minority of school student's parents. This resistance coupled with Pastor Bergren's passion for safety during the pandemic and related stress started to affect his health and wellbeing. This led to his seeking an alternative setting for his service and his resignation from St. Paul's in October of 2021.



### Mark Anderson

2021–Current (interim)

Pastor Anderson, who had recently completed a 20-year tenure on the bishop's staff in the Northeast Iowa Synod, became St. Paul's interim pastor in November, 2021. A member of St. Paul's congregation, he found himself leading the congregation at the time of the 150 year anniversary celebration.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Church as Place

### East side, West side

The children's song says it well: "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people." True as this may be, faith communities need a place to stand – and sit, and teach, and learn, and tell stories and (if they're Lutheran) drink coffee. In the beginning, a place to stand was precisely what St. Paul's congregation did not have.

In his twenty-five-year celebration history of the congregation, then-pastor Rev. Emil Rausch describes the rootlessness of the congregation's first years, and the eagerness to find a permanent location. There is some confusion about where the congregation first met. Dr. Gerhard Ottersberg, in his magisterial history of the congregation, mentions using an Episcopal church building. According to Rausch, the first worship services were held in 1872, "in a brick school building on the east side of the river, and then for a while on the upper floor of a wagon and paint shop on the west side." Sometime later worship services were relocated, once again, to the east side of the Cedar River. Rausch describes the rental facility as "the little brick church of [a] defunct Presbyterian congregation." This building was located near where Waverly's post office stands today.



*The Universalist church building stood just north of St. Paul's present sanctuary. It was the congregation's first permanent home.*





St. Paul's School on Second Street NW. This photo was taken in 1905.



Construction of the 1907 sanctuary was a major step forward for St. Paul's.

The next location was, once again, on the west side of the river. A Universalist congregation had disbanded and offered its building, less than a block north of St. Paul's present campus, for sale. In 1886, members rounded up what must have been a goodly amount of money for those days – \$800 – and purchased the building. Two years later the congregation expanded this structure with a thirty-foot addition.

### The first schoolhouse

The congregation had organized a parish school at the very outset. Some accounts suggest the school existed before the congregation itself. Originally, classes were held in the parsonage, which was first located on the east side of the Cedar River.

With the purchase of the former Universalist congregation's building, St. Paul's had committed itself to a permanent location. One block south, facing Second Street (and located approximately where the current school building stands), the congregation purchased land and constructed the first schoolhouse for the weekday training of children. This structure was eventually expanded. The building served the needs of the congregation for several decades.

### Second Street and Second Avenue

The struggling congregation of the early decades received a jolt of energy and enthusiasm with the arrival of the Rev. F. Zimmerman. Baptized membership exploded during his seventeen year tenure. At his arrival, there were a few hundred on the roster. When he departed the membership was 850. The days of a small, struggling congregation were clearly over.

Even with the thirty-foot addition, the former Universalist building had become woefully inadequate. The congregation was faced, for the first time in its history, with constructing a worship facility of its own design. Zimmerman, who

had encouraged purchase and enlargement of the Universalist building, helped create the impetus for the new structure, but departed the scene in 1903, five years before construction.

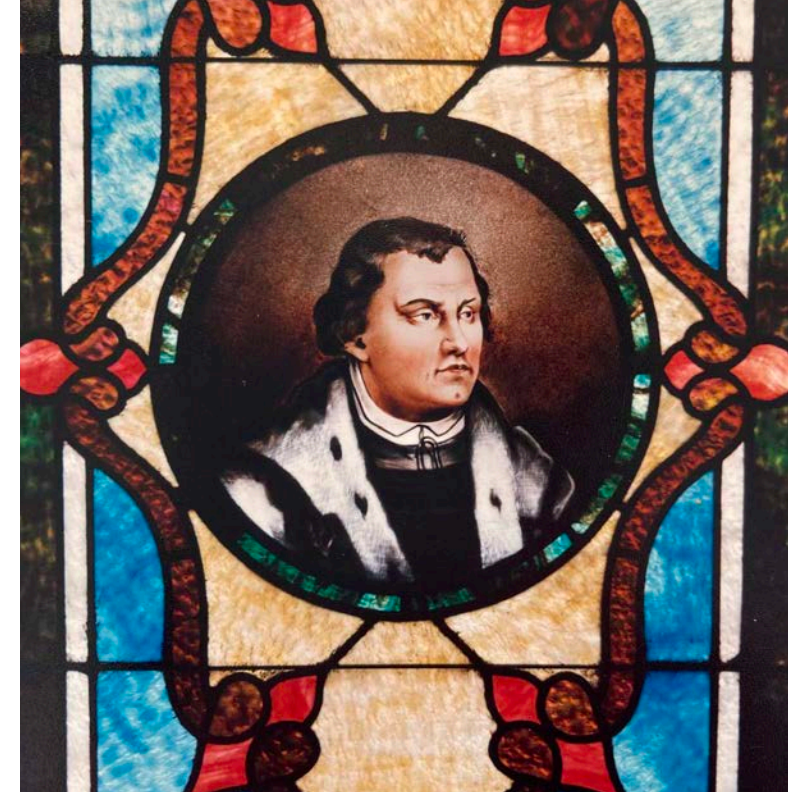
The Rev. John Weyrauch arrived in time to guide the new building to completion – the sanctuary still in use today, at the corner of Second Street and Second Avenue NW. He departed after only five years, just in time to see the magnificent large brick structure made ready for use. It must have seemed both exciting and frightening for members of the congregation to contemplate shouldering the debt on a building of German gothic design capable of seating between 650-700 worshipers.

The lot was purchased for \$2,500 (a house was moved before the ground could be excavated). Construction began in the spring of 1907 with dedication one year later. The congregation paid over \$32,000 for the building, a princely sum for those days. Fundraising covered \$15,000 of the debt, with the remainder secured by loans.

The pipe organ from the previous facility was moved to the new building. The stained glass windows were donated by members. The youth group paid for the bell that still rings from the tower (and, some years later, the marble baptismal font which still stands in the chancel). The altar, pulpit and Christ statue, all of which are

### A Parish House for St. Paul's

The wooden frame school building, along with room provided in the basement of the church building itself, provided space for non-worship activities in the decades following the move to Second Street and Second Avenue. But there was a growing need and desire for more space for parish activities. Simultaneously, enrollment in the parish school was making the existing facility woefully inadequate. A growing desire for a parish house developed, over time, into a serious effort to have one constructed. The goal was to provide space for the school, for



Thirty stained glass windows in the 1907 sanctuary include this rather romanticized portrait of Martin Luther. (For a more realistic portrayal of the Reformer, turn to chapter 12.)

still in use, were donated by couples married at St. Paul's, along with members of previous confirmation classes.

Pastor Weyrauch, retired and in failing health, was deeply moved when informed, just before his death, that the entire debt on the wonderful new building had been paid in full.

administrative offices and for congregational ministries and fellowship events.

At the 1936 annual meeting, members authorized studying building needs. This decision was made with some trepidation, given the fact that the Great Economic Depression was ravaging the country, making financial expenditures risky. Nevertheless, a committee recommended, in 1937, the construction of a parish house adjacent to the sanctuary.

There were setbacks. An estimated cost of \$60,000 was announced. A fund-raising drive



sought to collect pledges of at least \$45,000, an effort that fell short. A revised plan was adopted in 1940, with an authorized spending cost of \$47,500. (The final cost ran to \$50,000). The building was dedicated in February of 1941. This facility, an affordable block masonry construction, in contrast to the more expensive red brick exterior of the sanctuary, took on a somewhat Spartan look, reflecting an effort not to spend more than the congregation could reasonably be expected to finance.

## A New Parish School

By the mid-twentieth century, virtually all congregations in what was then the American Lutheran Church had given up their parish day schools. Congregations seem to have yielded to a pair of realities. First, as salaries and benefits for clergy improved, parishes were increasingly opting to redirect funds from the cost of their parochial schools toward improved clergy salaries and the coverage of other expenses.

Second, it was increasingly the perception among leaders of congregations that public schools were not only adequate but, in many cases, superior to Lutheran day schools in the variety and quality of education they could offer.

These considerations were not absent in the thinking among many members of St. Paul's Church as the nation emerged from the Second World War. St. Paul's remained an outlier, continuing its parish school and demonstrating what can only be described as tenacious loyalty to the institution. But there was a growing conviction among a significant minority that the congregation should give up the program, in favor of the excellent public school system in the Waverly community.

This debate broke into the open in the 1960s when a group within the congregation brought forth a proposal to accomplish two controversial goals. First, it was recommended that the worship space, now believed to be too small and somewhat old-fashioned in style, be demolished and replaced. Second, it was argued that



The 1941 parish house greatly expanded ministry space for the congregation.

the parish school should be closed with the savings to be realized redirected into a new church building. [This controversy and its aftermath are detailed in chapter 10.]

It was determined, following a time of acrimony, strife and significant loss of membership, both to preserve the existing sanctuary and to maintain the parish school. Having dismissed the idea of significant new spending for a new worship center, the congregation decided instead to build a separate school building. This would move classes out of the Parish Hall and free up that space for other ministry activities.



A Minnesota architectural firm designed the new parish school building.

What resulted was a remarkable piece of architecture, planned for construction south of Second Avenue, directly across the street from the worship center. The congregation contracted with the Sovik architectural design firm of Northfield, Minnesota. Their creation was a two-story building, providing room for K-8 classrooms and school personnel offices.

## The Connector Vestibule

Once the parish house had been constructed, it quickly became obvious that there was no way for worshipers to move from the sanctuary into the building next door without going outside and down the sidewalk. During rain or snow, this proved increasingly unacceptable. In addition, the opportunity now arose for solving a problem of long-standing: there had never been a good way for elderly and infirm members to navigate the series steps leading up to the sanctuary.

The solution proved to be a “connector vestibule” (referred to at its dedication as the “new narthex”), erected in 1974 and dedicated on Pentecost Sunday. The \$100,000 structure tied the worship space and the parish house together. For those unable to navigate steps, an elevator was added in 1988 at a cost of \$70,000. Not only did the new vestibule make it possible to move from one building to the other without going out of doors, it also provided additional space for worshipers and clergy to greet one another. The connector vestibule was eventually subsumed into the design for the 2015 Narthex Annex.

## Upgrading the Sanctuary

The 1906 worship center received a major facelift during 1992. The \$212,000 project included decorative repainting; repairing and refinishing the altar and the pews; rewiring the attic and improving lighting; improving the woodwork in the chancel area; installing a new sound system; carpeting the aisles and the chancel floor; refinishing the floor beneath the pews and improving the flooring in the balcony; and extending

Groundbreaking took place in 1963 with dedication in 1964. For the first time in its history, the congregation owned a quality brick facility dedicated primarily and specifically to parish school ministry. Also used for Sunday school classes for many years, the building continues to serve the school ministry today.



The “connector vestibule” joined the sanctuary to the parish house. Eventually an elevator was added, in order to facilitate movement for the physically challenged.



The sanctuary received a major upgrade during summer 1992.

the chancel, as well as moving the altar forward. During the weeks-long project, worship was held in the parish house.





To mark the 100-year anniversary of its original placement, the cornerstone was removed from the sanctuary building in 2007 and its contents displayed. A treasure trove of historically interesting documents came to light.

## The Narthex Annex

Shortly after the turn of the twenty-first century, sentiment began to build for finding a way to physically connect the worship center, the Parish Hall and the school. Part of the impetus for this idea came from a desire to demonstrate with brick and mortar the unity of ministry between church and school.

Even as this discussion was taking place, the disaster of the 2008 flood caused second thoughts about remaining “down by the riverside.” Some members wondered whether the time had not finally come to seriously consider relocating the campus to higher ground, elsewhere in the city.

Pastor Schneider heard myriad misgivings from parishioners about remaining in place. He recalls,

As the flood waters receded and the church and school facilities slowly became useable again, significant questions arose. Should the church just recognize that floods were becoming more frequent and more severe? Wouldn't it be prudent to move school and church to higher ground? The prevailing sentiment in the congregation was “No,” just it had been in the 1960s, when a plan to relocate and build had faltered. Clearly, the cost of building both a church and school in 2008 dollars at a different location appeared beyond the church's financial capability. The reluctance to move also rested on members' profound spiritual attachment to the building and sanctuary. It was and remains holy space that simply cannot be replicated. In addition, by this time the congregation had invested heavily in enhancing the chancel area with extensive neogothic woodwork, with completely restored windows and with having clad the roof and towers with copper. As disastrous as the flood had been, it could not dislodge the members' attachment to the rich beauty of its worship space!

With the flood behind them, members turned their attention to attempting an audacious new building project, which would carry a price tag of over \$3 million. Pastor Schneider presided over the effort. He recalls,

Church leadership began to take a critical look at existing facilities. If the church and school were staying, then how might we address inadequacies in the church and Parish Hall, and, to a lesser extent, the school? There were concerns about rest rooms, the kitchen, accessibility, a clearly-defined entryway, pre- and post-worship gathering space, and the use of the school for Sunday programming. Soon after the flood, St. Paul's purchased the Peace United Church of Christ property [north of the Parish Hall, on the same block] and paid for the demolition of its sanctuary, garage and parsonage. However, outside of providing additional parking space, the property was too far [away for] the church and school core to be factored into any building plans.

The idea of purchasing from the city one block of Second Street, directly in front of the sanctuary, to improve student safety had been discussed during Pastor Burk's time of service. At that time the idea received little support in the congregation and was dropped. After the flood, however, the Congregation Council brought the issue up again. The congregation was kept well-informed as the church approached the City of Waverly and negotiated purchase terms. A special congregational meeting was called to decide the issue. The price tag was \$5,000. The proposal passed, although not without dissent. Moveable gates were placed on the east and west ends for student safety.

Purchase of the street opened up possibilities for construction that would link church and school, not just in brick and mortar, but in a more unified mission and ministry. At the

same time, the existing building limitations could be resolved.

Myriad questions were raised as the project took shape when projected costs became known. Many questions were raised, including: “Why go to this effort and expense when we're just going to flood again?” “Where is the money for this coming from when the church general fund is always falling behind?” “Will it match the 1907-08 structure or be another unsightly box like the parish house?” “You are not going to mess with the sanctuary, are you?”

The plan was approved. Members felt reassured when it became clear that all new construction would be above the 2008 flood crest and on the same level as the sanctuary. An included chapel offered space for new worship ventures; the kitchen added space for the church's growing food ministries; and sanctuary-level access and accessible rest-rooms were included in the plan.

Though no major initial donors came forward in the fund drive process, the SPARK (“St. Paul's Ark”) committee and [Congregation] Council still concluded that enough



After the purchase of one block of Second Avenue NW, street barriers were put in place at both intersections. This kept traffic from intruding, providing safer passage for school children moving between the school, the Parish Hall and the sanctuary.



support existed to proceed. To reach minimal capital levels, financial commitments were secured from members. First National Bank of Waverly (now First Bank) provided financing.

The building project also made a positive statement to the Waverly community. The new building exemplified a commitment to the city's historic business and neighborhood core and was a strong statement that floods would not define the church's future.



The Narthex Annex brought the sanctuary, the parish house and the school building together. (The school is to the right of what is shown.)



Ground breaking for the Narthex Annex took place in 2004. It was accomplished by cutting a furrow with a plow blade pulled by church members.

Votes on several enabling resolutions were taken by paper ballot so that no one would feel pressured. Each vote passed with a greater percentage of support than the previous one.

After the building was dedicated in September of 2015, Schneider recalls,

Several who had not supported [the project] came on board with financial commitments. The building process was disruptive, noisy and dirty at times, but memories of disruption evaporated as the church and school community moved into the space.

The Narthex Annex connected school and church. The elevated view from the entryway and chapel onto Kohlmann Park and the Cedar River connected the church to the river's ever-changing vistas – and to streams of children and adults using the park for relaxation, recreation and play.

Former parish director of administration, Sally Schneider, was intimately involved in seeing the project to completion. She was physically present during the time the Narthex Annex was erected and recalls, "Once the construction began, it was overwhelming to watch the large amount of fill placed on the street to reach the sanctuary level. It was also a noise issue as the fill had to be compacted to make a stable surface. While [listening to the incessant pounding] was annoying, being able to access the sanctuary without steps was a marvelous achievement."

The Narthex Annex was dedicated in 2015. It has enhanced parish ministry in myriad ways, including providing new opportunities for the school, offering space for smaller worship gatherings, vastly enhancing space for church offices, and, significantly, reaching out to the city of Waverly by making the gathering space available for community concerts and recitals. The latter effort received encouragement from Pastor Bergren during his five-year tenure at St. Paul's.



The new addition has expanded and completely changed the footprint of St. Paul's campus.



The new Narthex Annex covered the vacated space where one block of city street had been.



The cathedral ceiling of the new Narthex Annex has created an airy space for gatherings.





## CHAPTER 4

# The Church as Worshiping Community

### “God’s Language”

No one any longer knows which pious Lutheran churchman first said it, but the sentiment, however ridiculous, was once popular. “German is God’s language. If it was good enough for Jesus, it should be good enough for us.”

St. Paul’s congregation began as a German-language worshiping community. The weekly Gottesdienst (the divine worship service) was first celebrated in borrowed space, then in sanctuaries which the congregation owned. Sermons, prayers and hymns were all voiced in the language of Martin Luther.

The Presbyterians, whose building they rented early on, or the Universalists, who sold them their abandoned sanctuary, could have told the German Lutherans that God also speaks English. Members of St. Paul’s came to terms with this reality during the First World War, when German-speaking citizens were sometimes badly treated.

In his history of the congregation’s first twenty-five years, Pastor Fangmeyer surmises that the first English-language worship service at St. Paul’s may have been one observed in the



*A sign of the times in the early twentieth century.*





During the first decades of the twentieth century, residents of the Lutheran Children's Home, like those in this undated photo, walked as a group the 18 blocks to worship at St. Paul's.



As late as the 1970s, the pews were generally full at Sunday worship.

midst of several German celebrations on the occasion of the dedication of the present sanctuary in 1907. But, for the most part, German persisted. A 1922 booklet celebrating the congregation's first fifty years was a German publication, appended with a brief English summary. (The 75-year booklet was English only.)

By the Second World War, St. Paul's was an English-speaking congregation, with German surviving as an alternative, provided at worship for the needs and preferences of older members. As late as the mid-1950s a German language Christmas Day worship service still survived.

### Evolving worship patterns

As the congregation grew, so did the need for additional worship services. The fairly spacious nave, constructed in 1906, was overflowing by the mid-twenties. One worship service was expanded to two. In the 1930s, when the Wartburg College student body began to grow, students made the six-block trek from campus to church for Sunday worship. The parish responded by adding a third worship service.

Over the years the student attendance declined and, eventually, almost disappeared, partly because Wartburg organized its own student congregation and partly because, with changing times and attitudes, and a lower percentage of Lutheran students at the college, Sunday worship at St. Paul's tended to revert to a members-only phenomenon.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, St. Paul's was holding three worship services, one on Saturday evening and two on Sunday morning. The Saturday evening service was introduced in 1991. It has never drawn a large attendance and has attracted, for the most part, older members. The first Sunday service has followed the historic Lutheran liturgy. It has featured use of the pipe organ, often the Chancel Choir, and occasionally the bell choir. The later Sunday service has taken on a contemporary flavor.

Children's messages at worship were first offered in 1992. The practice has continued,

featured at the two Sunday services. Pastors have been tenacious in continuing the practice, even when only a handful of youngsters have come forward to hear a story. On some occasions, a single child has bravely responded to the invitation to come.

Ecumenism became popular during the past half-century. Occasional worship services, often at Thanksgiving time, have been shared with non-Lutheran congregations in Waverly. A significant event occurred in 1983, during the 500-year anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. St. Mary Church, the local Roman Catholic parish, gifted St. Paul's with \$500, one dollar for each year since the Reformer's birth. At least locally, the age of Lutherans and Roman Catholics vilifying one another appeared to be at an end.

### Liturgy and Hymnody

Historically, Lutherans are liturgical. Martin Luther's conservative reformation insured that ancient and medieval worship forms would survive. Even now, 150 years from its founding, St. Paul's follows the historic Lutheran liturgical pattern – at least at services which are now categorized under the umbrella of “traditional worship.” Only since the middle of the twentieth century have more contemporary worship styles come into vogue.

During the past forty years, new worship forms have been introduced, including more contemporary hymnody, some of which has appeared in official Lutheran worship resources. One nationally-known contemporary worship musician, the late John Ylvisaker, spent his retirement years in Waverly, having affiliated with St. Paul's congregation. During the last years of his life, his musical acumen was drawn upon by music planners at St. Paul's.

Following a pattern adopted by many Lutheran and other Protestant denominations, St. Paul's has in recent years offered both “traditional” and “contemporary” worship forms. The latter have relaxed, and in some cases abandoned and replaced, traditional liturgical forms.



Pastor Joyce Sandberg shares a Sunday morning children's message.

Lutherans in North America have embraced synod-authorized worship books from early years. A service book published the Iowa Synod was used at St. Paul's until 1930. When the congregation joined the American Lutheran Church (1930-1960) the brown-cover *American Lutheran Hymnal* was adopted. Anticipating the formation of the (“new”) American Lutheran Church (1960-1988), the red-cover *Service Book and Hymnal* came into use. In 1978 the green-cover *Lutheran Book of Worship* appeared. After the ELCA was created in 1988, work began on the cranberry-cover *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, introduced in 2006. St. Paul's now uses this latest hymnal version.

It is worth noting that, upon his departure from serving as lead pastor at St. Paul's, Pastor Burk joined the worship team at the churchwide offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and was instrumental both in bringing *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* to birth and in helping with its introduction among ELCA congregations across the country.

In recent decades supplemental worship books, containing more inclusive hymns, have been used at St. Paul's, enhancing but not



replacing the congregation's primary worship book. Included among these additional resources are *With One Voice* and, most recently, *All Creation Sings*. Other contemporary worship resources have come and gone, serving their purpose for a season. These include *Chicago Folk Service* (during the 1980s), Marty Haugen *Hymnal Supplement* (during the 1990s) and contemporary worship events arranged and led on guitar during the 1990s by then-member John Ylvisaker.

## Changes in style, variety and practice

The introduction among North American Lutherans of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW) opened members of St. Paul's to new approaches to structuring worship. Multiple "settings" of the liturgy were offered, leading some church liturgists to jokingly refer to the publication as "The Lutheran Book of Options." It took determination on the part of leadership, and steadfastness on the part of worshipers, to master unfamiliar orders of service (LBW offered three liturgical settings, all of which the congregation



When Evangelical Lutheran Worship was introduced, copies of Lutheran Book of Worship went into storage.

eventually came to use). The result over time was an enrichment of worship.

Included in LBW's guidelines was the encouragement of more lay involvement in worship leadership. St. Paul's began using lay (non-clergy) Scripture readers at worship in 1974. In time, the role of "assisting minister" was adopted, which included speaking the prayers at the altar. During the 1990s, youth were also invited to serve as worship assistants.

In 2009, Dr. Penni Pier, a member of St. Paul's and professor of communication at Wartburg, led a workshop in public speaking for worship lectors.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, a veritable explosion of worship styles and opportunities were in evidence. Director of Music Patricia Hagen listed a dizzying array of opportunities on offer during one year: Weekend liturgies from LBW; Services of the Word at midweek during Advent and Lent (the latter using *Holden Evening Prayer*, folk musician Marty Haugen's popular folk liturgy); a Christmas Eve chorale service; a Sunday "contemporary service" (11:15 a.m.) using piano, song leaders and instrumentalists; a healing service; and a service for the blessing of animals.



During 2012 these young members of St. Paul's received training in the art of lighting candles for worship.

## The Eucharist

Lutherans inherited a dubious legacy in regard to Holy Communion practices. The earliest Christians seem to have celebrated the Lord's Supper as part of a community fellowship night, centered on a sort of pot luck meal, at the close of which everyone present shared bread and wine together.

During the Middle Ages Holy Communion evolved into a clergy-controlled rite with the wine reserved for the priest and the bread administered directly into the mouths of worshipers. A deep sense of fear pervaded the sacrament, encouraged by a phrase in a letter of Paul the Apostle, warning against "eating and drinking to one's own damnation."

Martin Luther instructed his followers to receive communion "in both kinds." He also railed against the fear-driven practice of avoiding coming to receive the sacrament more than once a year. "No fewer than four times a year," the reformer counseled. Unfortunately, his followers took that to mean "no more than."

In its earlier years, members of St. Paul's followed the four-times-annually pattern. By

mid-point of the twentieth century, pastors were encouraging monthly participation – and stressing the joyful nature of "the meal." Change was slow to take hold, especially among older members.

In 1978 the Board of Deacons recommended beginning the practice of weekly communion. This was a step too far for many in the congregation. A compromise was reached, so that the eucharist was offered at a different service each week. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, during the pastorates of Curt Schneider and Joyce Sandberg, every-Sunday communion was introduced at all services.

It was also among the older members where resistance surfaced in the mid-1970s, when ALC congregations were being encouraged to lower the age for first communion and offer it to children in elementary school. Fifth-graders were first invited to the altar rail in 1973. In 1989, third graders also became eligible.

There were misgivings voiced by some adults that "children cannot understand what Holy Communion really means." One youngster, when asked to explain, responded, "It's a way for me to remember that God loves me." The answer was both simple and profound – and doubtless changed the minds of more than a few skeptics.



As this display on the front of St. Paul's altar reminds worshipers, the first celebration of Holy Communion was around a table.

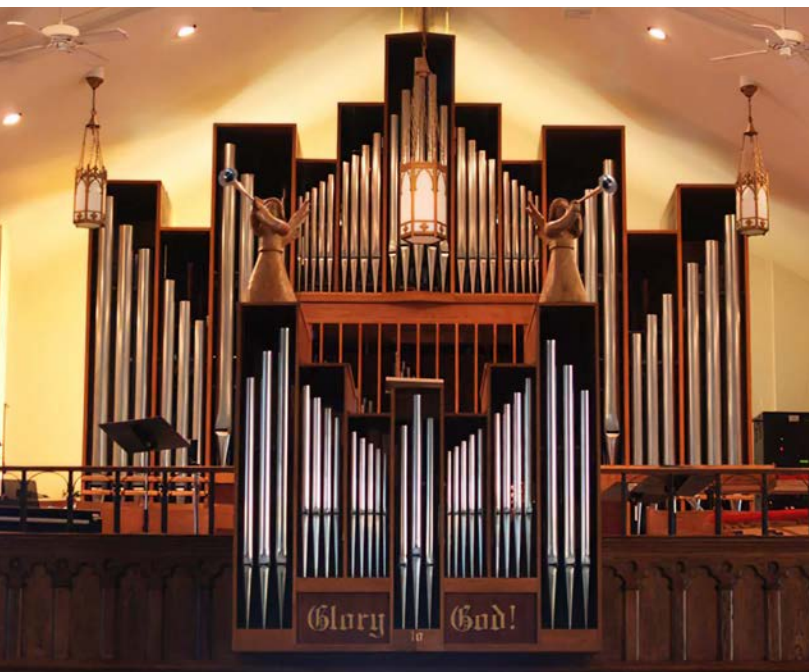
## Church furniture

The first Christians, frequently persecuted and meeting in secret, gathered around a meal-time table for worship in a private home. During the Middle Ages, long after Christianity had become both legal and established, congregations moved into buildings constructed specifically for worship, and the meal-time table was replaced by an altar, fixed against the back wall of the chancel. The emphasis had shifted from "meal" to "sacrifice." The priest turned his back on worshipers for the liturgy. This practice continued among Lutherans until the late twentieth century.





St. Paul's first pipe organ was used in the Universalist building and later in the school.



The current pipe organ accompanies Sunday 9:00 a.m. worship.

Following recommendations set forth by Vatican II, a Roman Catholic assembly of bishops in Rome in the early 1960s, Christians in many denominations began to use a "celebration table," set in front of the altar, allowing the clergy to stand behind it and face the congregation. This practice angered many traditional Roman Catholics and was slow to be adopted by some Protestants.

St. Paul's congregation experimented with the use of a "temporary" free-standing communion table, beginning in 1981. After major refurbishing of the interior of the sanctuary in 1992, the altar itself was moved out from the back wall, enabling clergy and lay worship leaders to stand behind it and face the congregation. With the introduction of contemporary worship, the free-standing table, placed in front of the altar, reappeared.

### Instruments for worship

Since early times, St. Paul's has enhanced worship through musical accompaniment. As early as 1872 a solicitation was launched to purchase an organ for the congregation. Eventually \$135 was raised for such an instrument. It continued in use for many years, eventually finding a home in the parish school.

When the present worship facility was constructed, a pipe organ was installed. It found regular use for seven decades. A new instrument was installed in 1976 at a cost of \$83,500. The pipe organ continues in use at "traditional" worship, while a contemporary service, introduced in recent years, makes use of piano and song leaders, along with wind, string and percussion musical instruments.

With the organization of Bells of Praise, anthems have been provided on an occasional basis by the congregation's bell choir, performing from the balcony. The parish school has also maintained a handbell choir.

### With a voice of singing

Choirs have enhanced worship at St. Paul's from early decades. By 1922 the Chancel Choir already numbered 28 women's and 14 men's voices. Youth and children's choirs were organized as the congregation grew. Over the years the parish school has maintained a choir of its own. An example of the rich variety of choral offerings is the listing provided at the turn of the twenty-first century by then-Director of Music Patricia Hagen: Cherub Choir (K-2); Friends of the Lord (grades 3-6); Grade 4-6 Choir; Day School Choir; New Creation Singers; Shalom Singers; Harmonizers for Christ (grades 7-12); and Chancel Choir (adult voices).

A complete listing of organists and Chancel Choir directors does not exist. The following are known to have served the congregation:

- Organists: O. Hardwig, E.G. Heist, Warren Schmidt, Nancy Houston, Roy Carroll, Patricia Hagen, Nicholas Klemetson, Karen Black.
- Chancel Choir Directors: E.G. Heist, C. Robert Larsen, Alan Hagen, Nicholas Klemetson, Mark Lehmann.

### Music as Evangelism

Pastor Wheeler recalls with some admiration the success enjoyed by Karen Dickman, whose children's choir managed to draw non-attenders to worship. According to Wheeler, "When Pastor Brown and I tried to attract some wonderful Wartburg College staff and faculty into our worship community, we failed miserably. But then

### Pat Hagen's magic formula

An observer of the church scene during the tenure of Alan and Patricia Hagen believes there was intentionality in the way Pat developed her music program.

She was a collaborator, and she was determined to involve people of all ages in music



Marilyn Pinkley, pictured far right, directed this youth choir in 1973.



Bells of Praise.

Karen Dickman invited their children to sing in her choir, cherubs in little red capes. Their parents, including the individuals we had failed to draw into worship, began to show up, some sitting in the front row. Karen Dickman was one of St. Paul's chief evangelists."

ministry. She knew a lot of students from her piano studio and her work as an accompanist for Alan's high school choirs. And, because students had so much respect for her, they would almost always say yes when she asked them to perform as soloists or in choirs or



instrumental ensembles. She also worked hard to involve adults.

When St. Paul's decided to add a contemporary service, Pat made it happen. She branched out into new styles for the piano-led service and recruited instrumentalists and singers from the congregation to join her in providing leadership for the service. She also took on the challenge of developing the summer outdoor service and finding music that worked in that setting.



Patricia Hagen at St. Paul's organ.

In December of 2002, singers and actors presented "Amahl and the Night Visitors," Menotti's whimsical story based on the arrival of the Wise Men in Palestine.

An effort was made to involve Wartburg College music groups at worship, both on Sunday and during midweek Lenten services. In 2003 the Wartburg Choir, the men's Ritterchor, and the women's Saint Elizabeth Chorale took their turns singing during Wednesday evening Lenten worship. During the same Lenten season, Tenebrae and Easter Vigil services were introduced. Five years later a Good Friday service, "Veneration of the Cross," was introduced.

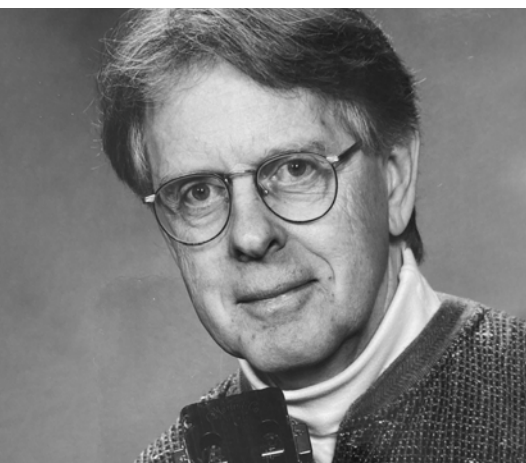
In 2006 a special midweek Lenten worship service for families was begun. "Kinderlenten" invited parents with children to a midweek observance in the lower level of the sanctuary. Youth

## Special music events and venues

During Patricia Hagen's tenure as Director of Music, a plethora of special music events made their appearance. In 1996 the congregation sponsored a hymn festival, a Christmas concert and a spring concert. Director Hagen offered, for several years, a "mini concert" on the pipe organ. Several of these performances were directed toward young people.

On the occasion of the 125-year anniversary of the congregation, Wartburg College Choir director (and St. Paul's member) James Fritschel created for the congregation a musical composition, "Blooms of Grace." John Ylvisaker contributed the musical piece "Saints on the Avenue."

In the early 2000s, summertime outdoor worship services began to be offered. Within a few years, there were around a half-dozen of these opportunities offered annually.



Folk musician John Ylvisaker.



Some of the cast of Amahl and the Night Visitors.

Director Paul Franzen organized and led these worship times.

In 2009 the congregation benefited once again from Wartburg College's music program when the Wartburg Reunion Choir sang at Sunday morning worship. Another men's choral group from the college, Feste Burg, provided Sunday morning music at both services on All Saints Sunday in 2021.

The congregation had long recognized the enormous popularity of Christmas Eve worship, usually attended not only by regular worshippers and their holiday guests, but also by many who seldom attended on a regular basis. By 2009, overcrowding at these services was becoming a problem. The Worship Board expanded the schedule, offering Christmas Eve worship at 3, 5, 7 and 9 p.m. In these years, total attendance for Christmas Eve swelled to around 1,000, far exceeding attendance on any "normal" weekend worship.

## Broadcasting worship

In September of 1959, St. Paul's went "on the air" with its Sunday morning worship. Radio station KWAY in Waverly began to broadcast one of the services to the wider community. The benefit to shut-ins, the elderly and the infirm was obvious. In this way, the reach of the worship service quickly expanded to a potential community audience of many thousands. The men of the congregation made it their project to raise the needed funds to purchase air time at the local station. When they were no longer able to continue this ministry, members were solicited directly for donations. This method continues today. In 2010, the radio broadcast was expanded to include one of the Christmas Eve services.

A dramatic expansion of St. Paul's broadcast worship presence came with the pandemic crisis of 2020-2021. [See chapter 10.] In the second decade of the twenty-first century the congregation employed the services of Devin Wipperman, a member of the congregation, as Director of Information and Worship Technologies.



St. Paul's has held a number of outdoor worship services during the summer months. This one was celebrated during the tenures of Pastors Burk and Sandberg.



St. Paul's worship services were livestreamed from the sanctuary starting in 2020.

Working with Wipperman, Director of Communications Hannah Hilgenkamp organized an Internet strategy for the congregation. As a result, St. Paul's came online, with streamed worship services. This proved crucial at a time when it was unsafe for congregants to enter the church building. During the worst of the pandemic, what viewers saw being broadcast was an empty sanctuary except for the pastor and lay leaders.

Hilgenkamp described to the congregation in 2021 how livestreaming of worship was accomplished. "We started with one service on Sunday and live Holy Communion on Saturday [a liturgy spoken by the pastor and streamed live from his home]. Through a generous donation, we were able to purchase the necessary equipment for livestreaming. As we got used to this new system, we were able to shift to two livestreamed services on Sunday with holy communion."



## The Klemetson Decade

Patricia and Alan Hagen retired from their roles in church music leadership in late 2010. A decision was made to create the position of Director of Music Ministry. The congregation advertised the availability of the position, for which over 20 applications were received. The list was trimmed to six, and then to three. The successful candidate was Nickholas (Nick) Klemetson, a St. Olaf College graduate who at the time was providing musical leadership in a Minnesota congregation. In a report to St. Paul's at the conclusion of his tenure, Klemetson reflected on his arrival a decade earlier. He wrote, "I was 26 and very idealistic, but I didn't have all the tools to realize those ideals."

The tools were honed over time. Klemetson ushered in a decade of expanded musical activity and accomplishment for the congregation. It was not without some controversy. Perhaps a bit like J.S. Bach, whose energy and musical expertise was sometimes marred by stubbornness of conviction with occasional insensitivity, St. Paul's new music ministry director created some friction as he developed his program. Some of the difficulty was probably due to a lack of maturity on his part. He grew into the role, but there were some collisions with parishioners along the way.

Because his predecessor had served for a decade, Klemetson also had to endure a measure of "he's-not-her" syndrome. Unlike Patricia Hagen, he tended not to be a collaborator. He cultivated his favorite music participants from within a limited circle of musicians and tended not to reach out to expand his resources. Those who remembered Hagen's success in this regard drew unfavorable comparisons.

There was, of course, much to commend Klemetson's leadership. His keyboard skills were impressive, both on organ and piano. His contributions to the life and ministry of St. Paul's as organist, Chancel Choir director, contributor (along with his musically gifted wife, Stephanie) to contemporary worship, creative music resource for St. Paul's School, and developer of numerous



Nicholas Klemetson

ambitious non-worship music events for the congregation, all created a lasting legacy for Klemetson and a positive result for the congregation.

During his ten years at St. Paul's, Klemetson organized and orchestrated three weekend worship services, each with its own unique style; created and led All Saints Vigils, complex productions involving organ, choir, readers and extensive musical repertoire; annual Advent concerts; and special music and service planning for Christmas Eve, Holy Week and Easter.

As the pandemic began to impact worship and ministry at St. Paul's, Klemetson did something unusual. He created a weekly half-hour online organ program, made available on a weekday, featuring St. Paul's pipe organ. Some weeks the broadcast amounted to a recital, other weeks to a sort of music appreciation seminar. He continued the series for well over a year.

In early 2021, Klemetson and his wife Stephanie received and accepted calls to serve as musicians for a large LCMS congregation in central Florida. They left Waverly at the end of May. As the 150-year anniversary celebration approached, Karen Black, a Wartburg music professor and member of St. Paul's, began service as parish organist. The Chancel Choir came under the direction of Mark Lehmann, also a St. Paul's member. Wartburg alumni and staff member, Sarah Bouska, was brought on to lead contemporary worship. The Cherub Choir, Friends of the Lord, and School Choir, were led by Karen Dickman, Erika Benschoter, and Katie Idler, respectively.

## CHAPTER 5

# The Church as Teaching Community

### Deepening understandings with Children, Youth and Adults

In addition to the parish school, which has a history of its own – and is treated later in this chapter – St. Paul's congregation joins the great host of Lutheran congregations across North America in having affirmed the value of and need for quality religious education.

A Sunday school for children began in the earliest years and has continued throughout the fifteen decades of the congregation's history. Like the congregation itself, the Sunday school began modestly and then expanded, eventually achieving an enormous enrollment.

In early years classes were held wherever space could be found. With the construction of the Parish Hall in 1940, classes were located there. For years after 1965, the school building also hosted St. Paul's Sunday School program.

A host of willing and capable volunteers have taught Sunday classes, using denomination-provided materials. Their numbers are too great to list. The same applies to the every-summer Vacation Bible School (VBS) program which, for many years, grew in enrollment and evolved in length. In recent decades, bowing to the complexities of modern life, fewer hours and fewer days make up an annual VBS program.



St. Paul's Sunday School in the year 1927

In 2011, a change to the public school schedule presented the congregation an opportunity to expand its Wednesday afternoon programming. Congregation member Rachael Nelson was tasked with developing the new preschool- and elementary-focused ministries, which were given the name "Saints Alive." As the Wednesday ministries grew, they eventually took over the role of the Sunday School program, which saw decreasing participation. Prior to the 2020 pandemic, over 100 students took part in the Saints Alive ministry under director of faith formation, Deb Bachman.



## Catechism and Confirmation

St. Paul's followed the pattern of virtually all North American Lutheranism by requiring catechetical instruction for its junior-high-school-aged youth. The process has evolved. In early years, the pastor(s) taught the students. As the parish grew, lay teachers were also engaged. Early on, instruction included a heavy dose of memory work – hymn texts, Scripture and material from Martin Luther's Small Catechism. Over time, the pattern has given way to more relational and interactive teaching, including retreats.

In recent decades, a host of volunteer adult teachers have helped to carry out the confirmation program, which has expanded well beyond classroom instruction to interpersonal activities, connecting students with others in the congregation at large.

A significant feature of catechetical instruction in recent decades has been an adult-student mentoring program. These one-to-one relationships have helped students learn Christian truth through interaction with adults who meet with them, discuss their study regimen, share their



St. Paul's Vacation Bible School children in the year 2000.

own faith insights and, on occasion, attend mid-week worship with them.

At the conclusion of catechism, students undergo the rite of Confirmation, which amounts to an affirmation of one's baptism.

## Adult Education

Lutheran adults have been notoriously reluctant to enroll in continuing education in matters of faith, doctrine and Scripture. A prevailing attitude has been that catechetical instruction "should have been sufficient," and is properly, therefore, terminal. And, if more instruction is needed, the pastor(s) can supply it during sermon time.

St. Paul's proved no exception to this pattern. Pastors sometimes strove mightily to instill in adult members an appetite for additional learning, usually with mixed results.



Jon Tehven, left, mentors a confirmation student during the 2013 class year.

## The steady growth of adult education

In the 1950s, Pastor W.F. Schmidt showed some creativity by offering a Sunday morning education hour for adults. Realizing an incentive would be required, he offered to structure a shorter Matins worship (less than an hour) followed by a Sunday morning study course, which he would lead. The result was great response for the shortened service and scant support for the study time which followed. The plan was soon abandoned.

A variety of attempts have been made, over the years, to engage adults in continuing education. A notable success was the introduction of The Bethel Series, a multi-year program designed to introduce adults to Scripture content and concepts. The ALC-produced "Search" Bible



The Search Bible study series attracted large enrollments in the 1980s.

study series for adults was offered on Wednesday evenings over the span of five years, beginning in 1982. A series called "Crossways" met weekly for two years during 1991-1993.

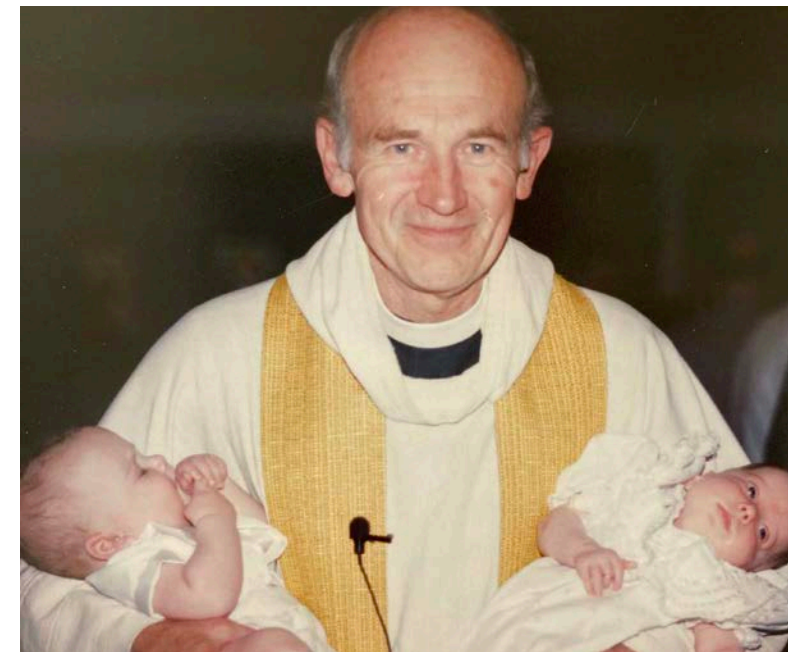
## Pastor Dickman's amazing Old Testament adventure

During his tenure at St. Paul's, Pastor Dickman introduced a study series based on content within the Hebrew Scriptures. The response was significant. Well over 100 participants filled the social room for many of his presentations. The success of this endeavor was due, in part, to Dickman's skills as a teacher and in part to the fact that he brought with him to St. Paul's a finely-honed understanding of biblical scholarship and a facility in the Hebrew language.

Pastor Dickman tells the story of how this unusual study series developed:

On my second day in the office, a group of members, including a few Wartburg professors, came to me and requested a meeting. "We've heard that you're a pretty good teacher," one of them declared. "We've heard that you even taught Old Testament at seminary. We want to study that."

"Great," I replied. "When shall we begin?" "Tomorrow morning!" they suggested.



Hebrew scholar and parish pastor, Dennis Dickman holds two brand new members of St. Paul's, following the Rite of Baptism.

And so it began, and so it was! It was decided that we would meet every Thursday morning from 8 to 9 in the Social Room, studying one book of the Old



Testament at a time, beginning with Genesis. I led the study for all who wanted to participate – members, non-members, as well as pastors of other congregations. The local Roman Catholic priest and a number of Wartburg professors were also frequently present.

Attendance became so great, often over 100, that we soon began a second session from 7 to 8 the same evening. That class never quite reached the large attendance of the morning group (perhaps because coffee and pastries were not on offer, as they were at the morning class). Still, many availed themselves of this evening opportunity. At the conclusion of each class, members presented me with a cash thank you, which I then used as seed money to purchase books for the next class. The summer was spent reading, studying, and preparing for the next fall class offering.

Amazingly, this Old Testament study lasted exactly 17 years, the time of my tenure at St. Paul's. It was the precise amount of time we needed to cover all 39 books of the Old Testament. Believe it or not, shortly after we had begun this Old Testament study, some class members, perhaps intrigued by the right-to-left writing I did of Hebrew words on the chalk board, asked for the opportunity to learn the Hebrew language. So we began a

one-year grammar course, followed by several years of Hebrew readings.

Then came further years of translating the Sunday morning Old Testament lessons. This was done at the home of Erna Moehl, long-time professor at Wartburg College and faithful member of St. Paul's. Erna affectionately called this venue "the Mole Hole." She always got us going with warm hospitality and coffee.

One morning, a cup was accidentally tipped, with coffee beginning to spread across the table. "Save the books, save the books!" shouted one enthusiastic pastor as he scooped up several Hebrew bibles.

Erna and Fran Mueller proved to be our top language students, as they even bested several pastors who were part of the group. After a 17-year course, perhaps some of our Hebrew students are still doing a little translating!

I think we all learned a lot. I know that I did, not only about the Bible and Hebrew, but also about people. We who are pastors and teachers should offer in-depth seminary-like classes, take the Bible seriously and keep studying on our own. Members will then do the same, rising to the challenge and the high expectations we have of them, treasuring God's Word forever.

## Twenty-first century learning opportunities

In the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, the Rev. Edgar Zelle, a retired pastor and long-time member of St. Paul's, led a series of courses based on the writings of contemporary Christian theologians. The Rev. Michael Sherer continued the series when Zelle stepped away. These offerings encouraged rethinking of traditional views of Scripture and doctrine. The conversations drew enthusiastic response from those seeking a fresh approach to questions about faith and life. Simultaneously, they caused resistance and even alarm among

some of a more traditional mind-set. Pastor Schneider affirmed the series, although without participating. To his credit, Pastor Bergren defended the series and its presenters with the wise and generous observation, "St. Paul's is a very large tent. There is room for a variety of approaches in this faith community."

During his five-year tenure, Pastor Bergren led a number of limited-term courses designed to acquaint adult members with Lutheran doctrine, Scripture and faith-and-life issues.

## A Blessed Burden

Few ministries have given St. Paul's a more unique identity than its parish school. Such a ministry was not unique when the congregation was founded. In the nineteenth century Lutheran day schools were the norm. By the 1940s, however, only a few schools survived among congregations which eventually became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

St. Paul's proved to be the exception. The continuation of its parish school has proved, during the past fifteen decades, to be both a blessing and a burden. The school has, over the years, led families to affiliate with the congregation because of the benefits they perceived the school would provide their children. And, the school has proven to be an effective method of outreach and service to the wider Waverly community, since a growing number of children enrolled are not St. Paul's members.

The burden created by retaining the school on the parish budget has, at times, led to serious debate and, occasionally, acrimony, especially at annual meeting time, when continuing to include funding for the school in the congregation's budget has sometimes been a flashpoint for debate, some of it rancorous.

## From generation to generation

Should all the citizens of the Waverly community who ever attended St. Paul's Lutheran School be gathered together in one place, their numbers would easily overflow the seats at Neumann Auditorium on the Wartburg College campus. The impact the school has made, over the years, through its graduates is incalculable.

When advocating for the school, its principals past and present have often remarked on the fact that junior- and senior-high school faculty in the local public system can immediately identify former St. Paul's students. The school has long maintained a practice of weekly



morning worship in the church sanctuary, with the expectation that students take leadership roles. It is these leadership qualities, honed over several years at St. Paul's School, that had made its graduates natural leaders in the public system. Organized in borrowed quarters, the school's enrollment expanded steadily. Even before the present sanctuary was constructed, a congregation had a two-room frame school house. Built in 1890, it was enlarged in 1901. Located in the block south of the sanctuary, it served the needs of teachers and pupils until after the Parish Hall was built. Eventually this building was sold and



moved to south Fourth Street, where it still stands, serving today as an animal hospital. [A picture of this structure appears in Chapter 3.]

The Parish Hall served as an adequate facility for the school, but only for about a dozen years. Before long more space was needed. The eventual result was the construction, in the 1960s, of the present modern school building. [See Chapter 3.]

For generations, the school educated students in grades K-8. Eventually, with falling enrollments in the top two levels, grades 7-8 were eliminated.

Gradually the school has evolved into an ecumenical ministry. From an all-Lutheran, German-language enterprise in its first years, the school had become, by 1996, a diverse community of young scholars. In that year there were 71 students whose families were members of St. Paul's; 26 from other Lutheran congregations; and 34 from other denominations. In that same year 54 percent of the students belonged to St. Paul's congregation. While this shifting statistic raises questions for some members – about



St. Paul's member Don Freeman shows first graders how to plant a tree outside St. Paul's School.

why St. Paul's continues to support the school financially – the majority within the congregation appears to support the operation, even with the member-family percentage trending downward.

In its earlier years the school was completely funded through the budget of the congregation. When this became too great a burden for St. Paul's, a modest tuition began to be charged. Today the school is funded from three sources: St. Paul's budget, tuition, and the school endowment fund. In addition, the School Fund committee organizes and raises significant funds for the school each year.

### A positive attitudinal shift toward the school

During her tenure as principal of St. Paul's School, Kris Meyer noted a "mood swing" among members and the wider community. According to Meyer,



Even after construction of the new school building, the parish house has continued to provide learning and activity space for day school children.]

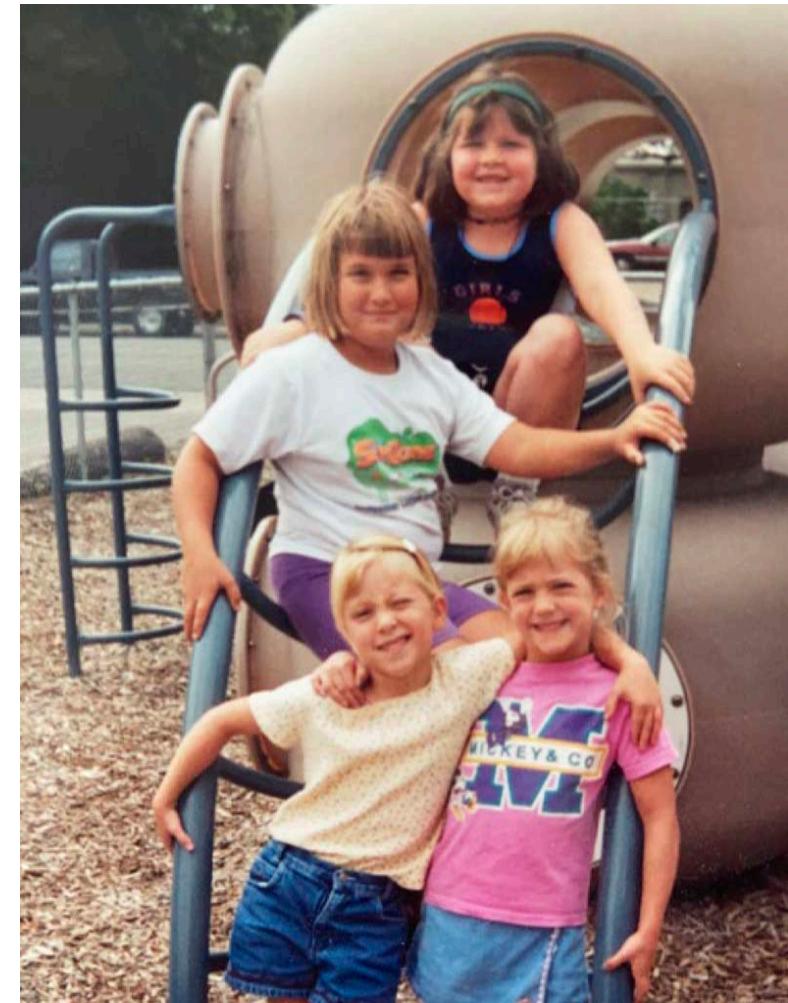
The mood of the congregation while I was principal changed during my tenure. There were several reasons for that shift. The school staff, school board, and school fund committee had a desire for others to know more about the school, so a concerted effort was begun to highlight what we were about and what we were doing. It was accomplished by holding several open houses, offering parenting workshops, participating in community events that allowed more to know about us, increasing the community awareness of St. Paul's Lutheran School through the Capstone fundraising efforts, KWAY radio announcements, programs on our school at MOPS, several civic organizations, and more.

When Pastor Bergren joined the staff, he was adamant about including St. Paul's Lutheran School as part of the congregation's unified title: "St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School." We made more of an effort to bring the voice of the school to Sunday worship by means of announcements and other vocal efforts as well.

### "There are spies in this school!"

A humorous (true) anecdote relating to St. Paul's School was shared by Pastor Burk. He reflected on the potentially awkward situation created when a pastor of St. Paul's has a child enrolled at the school:

Our two sons attended St. Paul's school for a time. Our youngest, who was there from pre-school through 5th grade, insisted that I had "spies" watching him. He explained that "you are the teachers" boss and they tell you things about me.' I told him he was wrong – but then I started paying attention. It became clear that several among the school staff were eager to tell me things about Aaron that they would never have mentioned to parents of other children – not because I was their "boss," but because I was nearby. Truth be told, it did him no harm and it prepared me for his adolescent years.



St. Paul's students enjoying the school playground equipment.



A portion of the scrap metal collected in 2021.



## The day the school went viral

Sixth graders enrolled at St. Paul's School have in recent years taken an annual trip to Washington, D.C. as their capstone project. In 2013, as the students visited the capitol building and the supreme court, they became aware that the White House had suddenly been closed to visitors (the president and congress were squabbling over funding at just that moment). The students from St. Paul's, who had already received tentative clearance to visit "the people's house," created a sign which read "The White House is our house. Please let us visit." On Facebook, they posted a picture of themselves, clustered around their sign. ABC Television picked up on the students' proactivity, interviewed them, and broadcast a story about the situation. The youngsters never did get into the White House, but their story "went viral," with newspapers as far away as Los Angeles reporting on the disappointed sixth-graders from St. Paul's Lutheran School of Waverly, Iowa.



Sixth-graders at St. Paul's School with their Facebook petition.

### Principals of St. Paul's School

1872-1891	Pastors Gerlach and Zimmerman
1894-1903	Otto Hardwig
1903-1913	C.F. Liefeld
1916-1920	Ida Goeken
1920-1927	Alma Schnoebel
1927-1940	Charlotte Becker
1940-1951	Elsie Mueller
1951-1961	Edna Wessel
1961-1965	Laura Kruse
1965-1970	Ray Knitt
1970-1977	Richard Pinkley
1977-1984	Glenn Bracht
1984-1988	Jan Ott
1988-1989	Joel Rutledte
1989-1998	Wanda Lightfield
1998-2013	Christi Lines
2013-2015	Stacey Snyder
2015-2018	Kris Meyer
2020-Current	Tamela Johnson



Four recent principals of St. Paul's School are, from left, Jan Ott, Christi Lines, Kris Meyer and Tamela Johnson.

### Parish School Enrollment (select years)

1903 - 40	1975 - 174
1922 - 74	1996 - 131
1947 - 103	2021 - 114 (K-6)
1972 - 110	100 (Pre-K)

## CHAPTER 6

# The Church as Missional Community

### From survival to engagement

From its beginning, the faith community that became St. Paul's Lutheran Church was engaged in mission. The understanding and focus of that purpose changed dramatically over time. Originally, the concern was for maintaining German Lutheran identity. Much as it may have seemed inward-looking to someone outside the community, preserving St. Paul's ethnic identity served an important purpose, especially during years of infancy. The congregation needed to fortify itself, much as a fledging eaglet needs time to prepare for flight.

St. Paul's did not long remain in survival mode, however. By the turn of the twentieth century there were already 700 members in the congregation. This seems like phenomenal growth for a pilgrim band that almost collapsed in the midst of controversy only a quarter of a century before. It is a testament to the hard work and magnetic personalities of St. Paul's early full-time pastors, and the happy circumstance that led to a large influx of German Lutherans into Waverly and the surrounding area.



## Mission Dollars

Even before the large gothic sanctuary was dedicated in 1908, the congregation was taking steps to engage and serve the community beyond its doors. An opportunity for outreach presented itself when, in 1899, the Lutheran Orphanage supported by the Iowa Synod relocated from Andrew, Iowa, to Waverly. Later known as the Lutheran Children's Home (and, eventually, Bremwood), the care facility needed financial support. St. Paul's members stepped up, providing a gift of \$5,000 for land purchase and building construction. Over the following generations, the congregation continued generous financial support.

The significance of the financial gift to the children's home needs to be seen in context. It happened at a time when the congregation was facing financial challenges, paying salaries and



preparing to finance a new church building. In fact, St. Paul's history developed as one with recurring financial difficulty. Financial support for ministries and causes beyond the parish frequently figured into debates over how to allocate available resources. To its credit, St. Paul's leadership consistently strove to maintain "benevolence" (outreach) spending, with more success at some times than at others.

On the occasion of special celebration, of which there have been several, St. Paul's showed exceptional generosity toward those beyond its membership. In 1947, for example, as the congregation prepared to mark its seventy-fifth anniversary, \$3,000 was raised for Lutheran World Action. This particular gift had poignant significance for members, since it was used in the post-war effort designed to help the citizens of Germany recover from the disaster of Nazism. With their nation left in ruins, many Germans were reduced to poverty. A great number of those benefitted by relief provided by Lutheran World Action were, of course, Lutheran, but clearly not all were.

Throughout its history, St. Paul's auxiliaries have provided financial support to causes beyond the parish. The Luther League and the Men's Brotherhood have been similarly responsive to need. The Women's Society has always led the way in generous outreach.



Young people from St. Paul's bring some cheer to a resident at Bartels Lutheran Care Center.

Among their myriad benevolent projects, the Women of St. Paul's have given support to the Waverly convalescent and county homes; financially supported a Native American child and a Japanese missionary family; packed and shipped items for Lutheran World Relief; sent financial support for Africa cultural exchanges; sent clothing to members of the Navajo Nation; and sent many thousands of canceled postage stamps to a Lutheran rehabilitation ministry in Germany.

Benevolent support for Bartels Lutheran Home in Waverly has been a budgetary reality for St. Paul's ever since the retirement facility was created (by means of a generous donation by a member of St. Paul's congregation).

It should be noted that members of St. Paul's have managed to continue and multiply financial support for extra-parish ministries even while supporting an increasingly-expensive day school. Making the case for continuing both efforts, former school principal Richard Pinkley once told this writer, "Some people argue we should close the school and instead give the money saved to benevolence and mission causes. I know of a Lutheran congregation in Missouri that took exactly this step. After three years, their financial support had dropped by the amount their school had been costing them. In the long run, they gained nothing – and lost their school."

Pinkley's point was obvious. When there is a will, there is a way to support church, outreach ministries and school, without eliminating

## Missional Living

With the creation of a Board of Social Concerns in 1971 (renamed the Board of Mission in 1991), St. Paul's found itself reaching out in ways not imagined in its early years. Activities included support for Vietnamese families relocating to Waverly; support for dispatching small tractors to rural communities in developing countries through Self-Help, a Waverly non-profit;



Richard Pinkley, a previous St. Paul's School principal, was a champion for Lutheran parish schools.

support to any of the three. Members of St. Paul's have demonstrated with their offerings that they have the will.

In 1987 the congregation embraced a "Faith for the Future" campaign, raising \$20,000 for support of two African students at Wartburg College; \$15,000 in support of Holy Family Lutheran Church and School in an economically depressed area of Chicago (its pastor, Charles Infelt, now retired and living in Waverly, is a son of St. Paul's); \$15,000 for a new Lutheran congregation in the Iowa District; and \$15,000 for an Hispanic Lutheran mission in Texas.

support of a boycott of Nestle corporation, over that company's destructive commercial program of discouraging breast-feeding of children in the third world; supporting area Habitat for Humanity projects; becoming a Bread for the World covenant congregation; promoting the sale of Fair Trade items, for the benefit of third world farmers; and the collection and donation





St. Paul's members volunteered on a Habitat construction project.



Barb Fricke, left, and the late Kirsten Hafermann sold Fair Trade products to St. Paul's members at Sunday morning coffee time during the second decade of the twenty-first century. These sales continue today.

of medical supplies and equipment to Global Health Ministries, a Lutheran non-profit based in Minneapolis.

Pastor Sandberg remembers the spirit of generous outreach that prevailed during her nearly two-decade tenure at St. Paul's.

When people in our area were hungry, the Mission Board stepped up appeals for the local Food Pantry and then offered an open invitation to the first free Thanksgiving Dinner in 1998. Saints Café was launched in 2007, followed by volunteers who filled back-packs with weekend food for students. A challenge was met with a response. St. Paul's people were often ready to respond to changes and needs in the wider community."

Saints Café, which fed only a few guests its first week, grew into an ecumenical partnership with other churches in the community. At its peak, before the 2020 pandemic, Saints Café served hundreds of meals each week to those in need of food or fellowship.

Even allowing for the fact that congregation has grown to considerable size and enjoys resources many other faith communities can only dream of having, it must be allowed that St. Paul's Lutheran Church has, during the past six or seven decades, embraced missional outreach with alacrity. What has been accomplished through the willing volunteers of this congregation is nothing less than remarkable. In many ways, St. Paul's has been a shining light, exemplifying missional outreach to its neighbors and to the church at large.

## St. Paul's Congregational Presidents Since 1925

Information for 1872-1924, 1933, 1934, 1938 and 1943 is unavailable. Until 1995, presidents were elected from and by the Council members. After reorganization in January of 1996, the president-elect (who would serve as president the following year) was elected directly by the congregation.

Start of Term	Name	Start of Term	Name	Elected
Jan. 1925	Louis Braun	Jan. 1977	Russell Solheim	Jan. 1996
Jan. 1926	Louis Braun	Jan. 1978	Russell Solheim	Jan. 1996
Jan. 1927	Louis Braun	Jan. 1979	Leo Johnson	Jan. 1997
Jan. 1928	Louis Braun	Jan. 1980	C. Arthur Christiansen	Jan. 1998
Jan. 1929	Louis Braun	Jan. 1981	Harvey Holleman	Jan. 1998
Jan. 1930	Ernest Roloff	Jan. 1982	Lowell Syverson	Jan. 1999
Jan. 1931	William Koch	Jan. 1983	Roger Bishop	Jan. 2000
Jan. 1932	Otto Hardwig	Jan. 1984	David Hampton	Jan. 2001
Jan. 1935	C.H. Graening	Jan. 1985	Lois Coonradt	Jan. 2002
Jan. 1936	Fred W. Studier	Jan. 1986	William Striepe	Apr. 2003
Jan. 1937	F.V. Culbertson	Jan. 1987	Don Heltner	Apr. 2003
Jan. 1939	Walter G. Voecks	Jan. 1988	Don Heltner	Apr. 2004
Jan. 1940	Walter G. Voecks	Jan. 1989	Jerry Vallem	Apr. 2005
Jan. 1941	O.C. Hardwig	Jan. 1990	J. Howard Mueller	Apr. 2006
Jan. 1942	G.J. Neumann	Jan. 1991	Randy Bruns	Apr. 2007
Jan. 1944	John Hiltner	Jan. 1992	Richard Schrupp	Apr. 2008
Jan. 1945	John Hiltner	Jan. 1993	Randy Groth	Apr. 2009
Jan. 1946	F.C. Koch	Jan. 1994	Jon Tehven	Apr. 2010
Jan. 1947	E.G. Engelbrecht	Jan. 1995	Jon Tehven	Apr. 2011
Jan. 1948	E.G. Engelbrecht	Jan. 1996	Al Bahlmann	Apr. 2012
Jan. 1949	Ernest T. Koopmann	Jan. 1997	Jill Gremmels	Apr. 2013
Jan. 1950	Elmer Knief	Jan. 1998	Kim Folkers	Apr. 2014
Jan. 1951	S. Wayne Jones	Jan. 1999	Gary Wipperman	Apr. 2015
Jan. 1952	C.F. Carstensen	Jan. 2000	Susan Vallem	Apr. 2016
Jan. 1953	Meinharedt Kettner	Jan. 2001	William Striepe	Apr. 2017
Jan. 1954	Arthur F. Droste	Jan. 2002	Kathy Olson	Apr. 2018
Jan. 1955	John Meyer	Apr. 2003	Robert Buckingham	Apr. 2019
Jan. 1956	W.H. Engelbrecht	Apr. 2004	Janice Johnson	Apr. 2020
Jan. 1957	J.O. Chellevoid	Apr. 2005	John Wuertz	Apr. 2021
Jan. 1958	J.O. Chellevoid	Apr. 2006	Fran Mueller	Apr. 2022
Jan. 1959	A.H. Niewohner	Apr. 2007	Hank Bagelmann	(presumed)
Jan. 1960	Laurence J. Carver	Apr. 2008	Rodney Drenkow	
Jan. 1961	Earnest Oppermann	Apr. 2009	Karen Thalacker	
Jan. 1962	David Hamilton	Apr. 2010	Ronald Matthias	
Jan. 1963	Ed Droste	Apr. 2011	Jane Juchems	
Jan. 1964	Chet Fraker	Apr. 2012	Daniel Black	
Jan. 1965	G.R. Bjorgan	Apr. 2013	Ron Zelle	
Jan. 1966	Virgil Hartman	Apr. 2014	William Hamm	
Jan. 1967	David Hampton	Apr. 2015	Abby Jerome	
Jan. 1968	Mel Nannen	Apr. 2016	Peter Newell	
Jan. 1969	Ivan Ackerman	Apr. 2017	Lynda Abkemeier	
Jan. 1970	William Striepe	Apr. 2018	Monica Severson	
Jan. 1971	Al Bahlmann	Apr. 2019	Allan Bernard	
Jan. 1972	Earl Janssen	Apr. 2020	Josie Beckstrom	
Jan. 1973	David Ellefson	Apr. 2021	John Meyer	
Jan. 1974	Merritt Bomhoff	Apr. 2022	Rick Juchems	
Jan. 1975	James Hansen			
Jan. 1976	J.O. Chellevoid			





## CHAPTER 7

# The Church as Social Fellowship

### The Third Lutheran Sacrament

It has jokingly been argued that Lutherans cannot function without coffee, “the third Lutheran sacrament.” While this is clearly an exaggeration, it has been shown to be an accurate description of what helps lubricate the engine of ministry.

Not only do they like their coffee, Lutherans also like to eat. The members of St. Paul’s have been enhancing the quality of their life together almost from the beginning. The unfortunate episode concerning a church picnic/fair gone badly off the rails [see chapters 3 and 10] was an example, nevertheless, of members of St. Paul’s following their best instincts. In addition to raising badly needed funds for the fledgling congregation, they sought to build community through food, drink and social interaction.

During Pastor Fangmeyer’s tenure an annual picnic became a fixture on the church calendar. It was held in September and was designed to welcome students back to Wartburg College – and, implicitly, to invite and welcome them to worship. During the same period, a series Family Night fellowship events were held, organized by the Luther League, with assistance from the other parish auxiliaries. The idea was to build



*The 2004 annual church picnic continued a 60-year tradition.*

a spirit of community among the membership. The annual picnic continued for many decades.

All the key milestones celebrated at St. Paul’s Church have been accompanied with festive eating and drinking. The construction of the Parish Hall in 1940 enhanced this activity. Countless fellowship functions have been held in this space.





The new narthex has become the Sunday morning fellowship venue.

With the construction of the new Narthex Annex, the building bridging sanctuary and school, Sunday coffee time has moved in under the cathedral ceiling. Bonding and social interaction takes place during coffee time.

While funerals are times of solemn assembly at St. Paul's, they also provide opportunity for reunion and fellowship. Easter breakfasts and funeral meals have been times of social interaction and re-connection, sometimes bringing



The 1975 Easter breakfast featured decorated eggs on the tables.



Pastor Schneider, left, lends a hand in the kitchen during a Thanksgiving meal.

together former members with family currently affiliated with the congregation.

During her final year at St. Paul's, Pastor Sandberg reflected on fellowship activity in the congregation during the previous twelve months. Drawing on a bit of humor and hyperbole, she declared, "There were about a million cups of coffee prepared and served, along with tea and lemonade for all kinds of different gatherings. Saints' Café (a meal ministry for the community) has grown; Sunday morning fellowship switched to the new narthex; Sundays and Easter breakfasts and more than one delicious fundraiser for school and church have all contributed to our opportunities to serve Christ by serving our neighbors."

## Auxiliaries

Fellowship groups for women, men and youth have functioned at St. Paul's from early on. Suffice it to say, these three organizations have, over fifteen decades, served the parish and beyond through activities that benefit not only themselves, but the community and the world.

In the generations before the widespread availability of television and the Internet, the three auxiliaries provided outlets for deepening fellowship and building camaraderie. All three groups have provided study and learning opportunities for their members. The women's group continues to do so through its circles, although in diminished numbers due to the complexities of modern life and the now almost-universal phenomenon of younger women working outside the home.

## St. Paul's women

In earliest times, the women's group at St. Paul was known by its German name, Frauenverein. A second women's organization, the Women's Home and Mission Society, came into existence in 1920. A third group, organized to do sewing to benefit orphans at the Lutheran Children's Home, was known as the Orphans Aid Society. Still later, there also existed a group calling itself Daughters of Reformation. And, there was the Tabitha Circle, a women's group dedicated to projects benefiting the wider congregation.

On occasion, the women became proactive, especially when a perceived need appeared to be going unaddressed. Their initiative, almost at the beginning of St. Paul's existence, was well-intentioned – a parish fair to raise funds for a church building. The event resulted in a fiasco (ironically, because a woman – the pastor's wife

In 1949 a couples fellowship group calling itself "The Double or Nothing Club" came into being. Its purpose was to foster a spirit of fellowship and volunteer service within the congregation. Thirty years later, the group opened its membership to singles. In 1987 it underwent a name change, thereafter to be known as "Friends in Faith."

In 1990 a fellowship committee was organized. It sponsored structured activities for families, couples and singles.

– raised an objection that led to an actual schism). Still, several hundred dollars were raised, the congregation survived and many who departed eventually returned.

It was the women who first began to raise funds to pay for a new Parish Hall (eventually the congregation embraced the project with congregation-wide fundraising).

Following the churchwide merger of 1960, the women of St. Paul's were reorganized as The American Lutheran Church Women. The larger church recommended local women's organizations divide into circles for more intimate gatherings. This pattern was adopted at St. Paul's and continues.

The ALC had directed local auxiliaries to automatically enroll all women of a given parish in their membership. St. Paul's women's group originally followed this pattern, but revised this protocol in 1974 by becoming a voluntary organization.

The women's auxiliary has supported myriad outreach projects, including providing support for the Waverly Convalescent Home and the Bremer County Home; structuring visits to homebound members; serving funeral lunches at St. Paul's; financially supporting Bartels Lutheran Home, Bremwood and other community ministries; financially assisting a Native American child and a global missionary family in Japan.

A trademark activity of the women's group has been sewing quilts for distribution through



St. Paul's Frauenverein (Women's Society) in 1922.





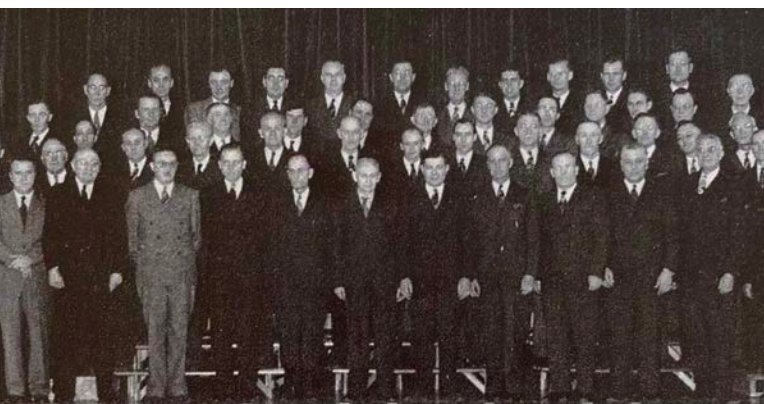
Quilting has been a key activity for St. Paul's women through many generations.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF). On monthly "do-days," the women sewed, packed, and shipped the quilts, along with other items needed in foreign countries. A mid-1980s report from the women's group reported a one-year

### Men of St. Paul's

A men's group was organized early in the history of the congregation. In Pastor Fangmeyer's history of the parish, there appears a photo of the Brotherhood of St. Paul's. Taken around 1943, it pictures an impressive assemblage of over 60 men.

In his history of the congregation, Gerhard Ottersberg describes the work of this group at mid-century: "The Brotherhood [supported] special projects and at times enlisted its members, as well as others, in work activities



St. Paul's Brotherhood during Pastor Fangmeyer's tenure.

shipment of 253 quilts, 17 health kits, 40 school kits, 112 layettes and 625 pounds of homemade soap. In 1995 a similar effort created 113 quilts, 17 blankets, 40 school kits, 19 health kits, 35 layettes and the collection of 17 boxes of clothing.

During 2001 the women donated thirty dozen cookies to the local blood drive. In the same year the auxiliary sponsored two Sunday radio worship broadcasts, one of which was intended as a celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the decision by the predecessor church body, The American Lutheran Church, to begin to ordain women.

In St. Paul's fifteenth decade, the number and size of women's Bible study circles has continued to contract. Membership today tends to include older women. Attracting and engaging younger members is a challenge for which a good solution has been elusive.

in connection with undertakings in repair and building. Men's activities were supplemented in various ways. Breakfast conferences were held, inviting men to study topics on spiritual life. An annual retreat used a weekend for study and devotional purposes. There was participation in area lay conferences for the purpose of theological study."

The men's Brotherhood no longer functions as a structured auxiliary, although men's small group Bible study cells currently meet, usually on weekday mornings.

Although no longer functioning as an auxiliary, the men of St. Paul's have volunteered their services in a variety of ways during the past fifteen decades. Their ministry has included such varied activities as service and leadership on boards and committees; teaching Sunday school classes; volunteering as ushers and in other capacities during worship; and working on maintenance projects at the church campus.

### An evolving youth ministry

The youth ministry of St. Paul's congregation was organized in 1891. In 1914, members of the youth group engaged in a fund-raising project and paid for a marble baptismal font for the church sanctuary. The font continues in use. First known as Der Jugendverein ("the young people's society"), its members were pictured in the first historical publication of the congregation, wearing formal dress (all the men in suits and ties, the women all bedecked with hats). In another photo, dated around 1947, most of the ties and all of the hats have come off. By then, a Junior Luther League had also been organized. Still younger youth belonged to a group called the Junior Mission Band, organized and supervised by the teachers at St. Paul's Lutheran School.

In its first decades, St. Paul's maintained a youth ministry that tended to be focused on "keeping Lutheran young people faithfully Lutheran." Gatherings would sometimes include worship and study. (Significantly, from earliest days, one of the stated officers was that of "pianist.") Fellowship and refreshments added to the mix at meetings. For generations, the organization provided a time and place for social interaction. The young people, lacking other diversions or opportunities, would reliably attend.

Since the arrival of television, the public movie theater and the widespread availability of automobiles – providing mobility, expanded activity opportunities and, sometimes, previously



Men of St. Paul's have frequently stepped forward to help keep the church campus trim and tidy.

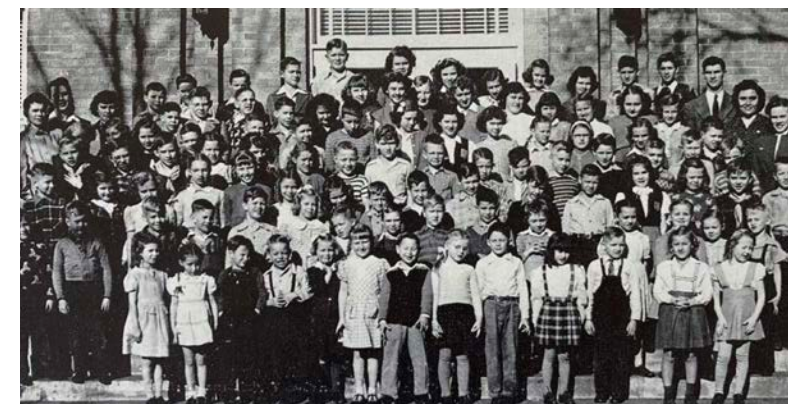
unforeseen temptations for young people – the scene has changed. While it would not be accurate to say that youth ministry has devolved into "entertaining the youth," youth ministry leaders have found it increasingly necessary in recent decades to draw upon more creative approaches to engaging young people's hearts and minds.

Since the early 1960s, the youth of St. Paul's have participated in outings designed to build community, including such activities as retreats at Camp EWALU at Strawberry Point; service trips, including for some years, visits to Holy Family Lutheran Church in urban Chicago; trips to Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State; and numerous trips to participate in churchwide youth conventions.

A memorable convention experience for St. Paul's young people occurred in the early



The St. Paul's Young People's Society in 1922.



St. Paul's Junior Mission Band was supervised by the school staff. This photo dates to the 1940s.



1960s, when space on a passenger train was reserved for Luther Leaguers heading for Miami, Florida. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been advertised as a keynote speaker, scheduled to address the many thousands of participants. At that time, the Rev. David Brown, later to serve as pastor at St. Paul's, was director of the Youth Department of The American Lutheran Church. He was instrumental in persuading – and then re-persuading – King to participate in the event in Miami, even after conservative ALC clergy temporarily succeeded in convincing the Baptist pastor he ought not show up for his already-arranged presentation.

In recent years youth activities have taken on a more socially-conscious flavor, while still focusing on building fellowship and camaraderie. In 1995 nearly a dozen youth and their adult sponsors completed a mission trip to Wind River Native American Reservation in Wyoming. It was a time that combined fun with service, study and worship. Back home, many youth attended Sunday morning “Breakfast Club” gatherings.

Other service events have included doing yard work for homebound members; assisting with the wheelchair ministry at Bartels Lutheran Care Center; “coffee/bingo” with senior citizens; food collection and donation (including promoting the annual “Souper Bowl Sunday” project



A St. Paul's youth shows no fear of heights while helping build a Habitat house.

and participating in CROP walks); and helping to maintain St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery.

In recent decades, a sometimes-dizzying array of activities has occupied the young people involved in St. Paul's youth groups. A sampling includes helping with Advent and Lenten soup suppers and Easter breakfasts; organizing a spring dance; participating in a softball league;



St. Paul's Youth Council. The photo was taken during the 1970s.



St. Paul's youth experience the thrill of whitewater river rafting.

attending youth gatherings, including those sponsored by the synod's Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO); attending “Youth Quakes” and LYE conventions; heading out to the ski slopes (obviously not around Waverly); lock-ins at the parish house; and camping at EWALU Bible Camp.

In 2001, young people from St. Paul's participated in a mission trip to Cortez, Colorado. Of the visit by fifteen senior high youth to the Ute Indian Reservation near that city, St. Paul's then-youth coordinator, Denni Puhmann, said, “Those attending benefited a great deal in their learning about themselves, in getting along with others and in their faith walk.”

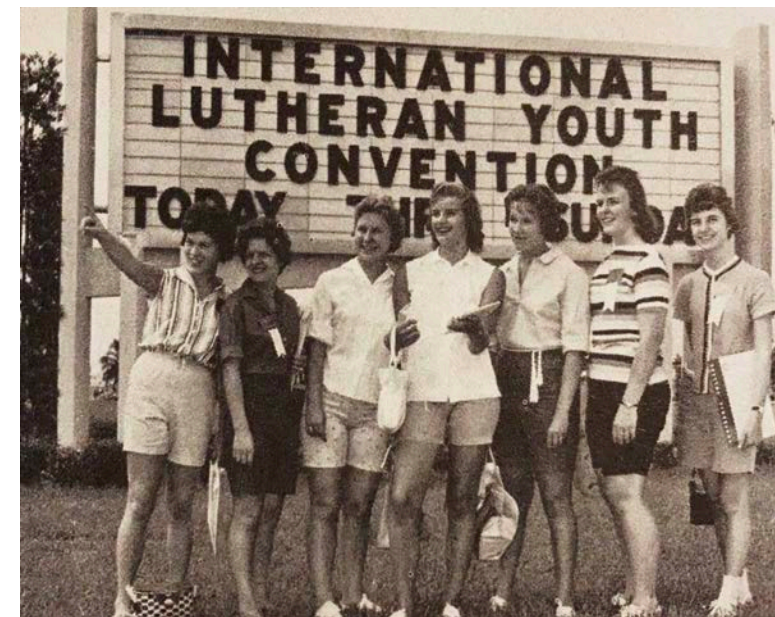
During the same year, fifteen senior high students participated in a Peer Mentoring Training. The program prepared the young people to assist with leading small groups, to be mentors of confirmation students, and to assist in youth ministry with younger members (the junior high school group).

Describing 2003 youth involvement, Puhmann catalogued the following faith-building activities: “Usher, lector, greet, serve communion; plan, lead, implement special youth-led worship; confirmation mentoring; teaching Sunday school.” In addition were the relationship-building events: “Canoe trips, camping trips, bowling, miniature golf, movie nights, game nights, lock-ins, hiking, capture-the-flag.” Most of these items reappear in reports for the following years.

In 2004 young people shared in a four-week “Youth with a Mission” event, which included seven community service projects.

A trip to San Antonio in summer, 2006, drew twenty youths and adult sponsors deep into the heart of Texas for a week during the ELCA's National Youth Gathering. Then-youth director Kevin Grondahl explained, “Our experiences [during the trip] helped us to grow as a group, which came in handy when the charter bus's air conditioner stopped working for 13 hours on the return trip in the Texas heat!”

Worth noting was the expanding reach of youth ministry that year, as the senior high students participated in ecumenical Bible studies



Seven St. Paul's youth posed for the photographer at the Miami Youth Convention. Kathe Mensing, pictured far right, eventually married the author of this history.



Youth prepare a mailing for Self-Help, a Waverly-based non-profit assisting farmers in developing countries.

and activities with their counterparts from Redeemer Lutheran and St. Mary Roman Catholic churches. The same year, five youth attended the “Wholly Iowa Youth Leadership Discipling Event” at Luther College. The experience equipped them for leadership with younger youth at St. Paul's.

In 2008, Paul Frantzen joined the ministry staff as Director of Family and Youth Ministry.





Young people were caught up in a line dance at a LYE convention.

He brought to the task a quiet earnestness, combined with an ability to engage effectively with young people. He also had a puckish sense of humor, evidenced in a report he submitted following a winter outing: “Youth events this past year included a ski trip – ten youth, five chaperones, zero injuries. Thank the Lord!”

The following year, a group of youth attended the National Youth Gathering in New

### An ongoing challenge

Creatively and effectively engaging young people in the life and ministry of the congregation, and helping them on a path to faithful pilgrimage in the Way of Jesus the Christ, has become an increasingly challenging task. Young people today face myriad diversions and temptations. The availability at this time in history of public electronic media enables new ways to connect with youth – and for youth to connect with one another. It also presents channels through which young people can be led astray.

Youth ministry leaders at St. Paul’s have responded to this new reality in good and helpful ways. Signs are that they will continue to adapt with vision and energy, as the scene continues to evolve.



St. Paul’s Youth helped construct this float for a Heritage Days parade.

Orleans. Junior-high-school youth experienced a Chicago mission trip, during which they visited Holy Family Lutheran Church, worked at a shelter and explored the city. During 2012, high school youth participated in a mission trip to Atlanta, while junior high young people experienced an urban immersion in Minneapolis. In 2018 the youth participated in the Houston National Youth Gathering.

### Youth ministry leaders at St. Paul’s during the past four decades have included:

- Mary Rowland, 1980-1987
- Gloria Strickert, 1988-1996
- Suz Smolik-Hagen, 1994-1996
- Linda Keeter-Schultz, 1996-1997
- Justin Boeding and Sara Larson, 1997-2002
- Denni Puhmann, 2002-2004
- Kevin Grondahl, 2005-2008
- Paul Frantsen, 2009-2016
- Dani Vogel, 2016-2018
- Deb Bachman, 2018-Current

## CHAPTER 8

# The Church as Stewarding Community

### Rendering unto Caesar, or unto God?

For the Hebrew covenant people, Rome’s claim to own virtually all the real estate in Palestine was an outrage – because, according to Hebrew Scripture, everything belongs to God. Neither the emperor nor his subjects can legitimately lay claim to wealth. According to Jewish belief, human beings own nothing. They are called to be caretakers and stewards for the Lord of all.

Lutherans understand this principle and, at their best, affirm it. Persuading the members of St. Paul’s Church to embrace this insight has

### A never-ending challenge

The history of stewardship among St. Paul’s members has been one of ongoing struggle to pay for the cost of effective ministry. This has been true from earliest times, and continues to be the case at the end of the congregation’s fifteenth decade. In this context, it seems almost astonishing how much has been accomplished

not been an easy task. There have always been members of the parish ready and willing to treat their property and wealth as a gift from God – or, better, as treasure on loan. For others, the concept has seemed foreign. Experts who analyze congregational dynamics claim, with some justification, that there is an 80/20 rule that applies to most faith communities. Eighty percent of finances and service are provided by twenty percent of the members. Highly successful congregations find ways to narrow the spread, a task that can require herculean effort.

in this faith community. The ambitious ministry work St. Paul’s has carried out, since its founding in 1872, is truly impressive.

Few could have imagined, during those spare first years when members gathered to worship in borrowed space upstairs in a commercial building, that their fellowship would one day swell



to over 3,000 baptized membership (currently around 2,000) with an annual parish budget now in excess of \$2 million. Over the space of fifteen decades, the reality of such an all-encompassing budget did in fact come to pass, bringing with it the yearly task – and opportunity – of raising the needed funds to fully subscribe such an ambitious spending plan.

In other chapters, the faithful stewardship of worship, service, study and community

## The first years

At the outset, there were but a handful of members. The original community, a sturdy band of pilgrims, had limited financial resources. The women of St. Paul's resorted to a fund-raiser to help pay for a church building [See chapter 10]. The effort was launched because insufficient support was available from weekly offerings. (In the twenty-first century, a report from the Women of St. Paul's declared, emphatically, "This organization does not do fund-raisers." Times have changed.)

The success in raising \$800 in order to purchase an abandoned Universalist church building in 1886, only fourteen years following its founding, suggests that St. Paul's was ready and willing to sacrifice financially when a concrete goal was in sight. This pattern has repeated itself time and again over 150 years. The decision to construct the present sanctuary, in 1905, at a cost of over \$32,000, and success in retiring the

## Facing reality

During Pastor Rausch's tenure a significant step was taken. He had inherited a pattern of inadequate financial support from members, causing a chronic shortfall of funds. The result was embarrassing overdrafts at a local bank, requiring borrowing and the paying of interest in order to keep the congregation afloat financially. An

engagement has been described. In addition, the previous chapter details generous financial benevolence provided by members for those in need beyond the congregation. In this chapter, the effort will be to chronicle the response to financial need for ministry within St. Paul's Church – the struggle to secure funds for clergy and teacher salaries; for the cost of building and maintaining structures on the church campus; and for synodical benevolence allotments.

debt in only a few years, further illustrates this tendency to respond as stewards when a tangible goal is in focus.

Less successful has been the willingness of members to fully subscribe the agreed-upon parish budget. Time and again, covering necessary expenses has proven to be a heavy lift, increasingly so as the congregation grew and the cost of ministry grew with it. Attempts to persuade members to meet financial commitments has been, over the course of many pastors' ministries, a burden that has too often become a distraction to accomplishing mission goals. The properly considered decision to maintain a parish school at no small expense has contributed to this ongoing challenge. To the credit of many in the congregation who have risen to the task, time and again, agreed-to financial goals have nearly always been met.

unworkable system of receiving and collecting pledges from member families, along with undesignated funds, contributed through Sunday morning offerings, was replaced, in 1921, with an every-member canvass and a weekly envelope system. For the short term, at least, this seems to have alleviated the problem.

## Rapid growth: Blessing and Curse

When St. Paul's was a small, struggling faith community, financial resources were hard to come by for the simple reason that there were so few in the fellowship to cover expenses. Within a decade, however, the congregation began to expand rapidly. That reality brought with it a challenge of an entirely different sort.

With the increase in membership came growing expense. A large physical plant requires money to operate. Moving from temporary and then part-time leadership to fully-salaried clergy – first one, later two, eventually three pastors – and a growing parish staff, including, in time, a full faculty of school teachers, resulted in the need for higher and higher levels of financial support from the membership.

Even before Pastor Schlueter accepted the call to lead the congregation, in 1932, the Great American Economic Depression had descended upon the land, holding the nation in its grip. Sources of revenue began to dry up. Incomes shrank. Unemployment became a serious problem. Many of St. Paul's members were still earning their livelihoods from the soil, so that they could at least support their families. But their ability to contribute to the ongoing needs of an increasingly-large congregation were diminished.

Even without a building project to underwrite – the congregation was yet to begin fund-raising for the parish house – an annual deficit in the church budget became a problem. In his 100-year history of the congregation, Gerhard Ottersberg offers the insightful observation: "When improvement set in [following a wearying succession of years of indebtedness], St. Paul's found it difficult to shake off a deficit habit." This pattern would continue to plague the leadership long after the Great Depression had faded into history.

Not until 1936 did St. Paul's report a year with income exceeding expenditures. And, ominously,



Annual Meeting, 2001.

that was the only year "in the black" the congregation was to experience for decades. Red ink became the norm in church ledgers at the end of each calendar year.

It had become clear that rapid growth, with a membership eventually to exceed 3,000, was something of a blessing and a curse. One may be tempted to chalk up the shortfalls in the parish budget to poor stewardship on the part of members. At least in the case of the faithful minority who were accustomed to doing their part and, frequently, going the extra mile, this was manifestly not the case. On the other hand, service on the parish finance committee cannot have been a welcome task during many of the years of the congregation's fifteen decades.

Some of the reasons for financial shortfall included: the ongoing need to make repairs and improvements on an increasingly large physical plant; the need to add more staff as the membership increased, requiring additional line items for more salaries; a proper desire to improve the level of salaries, which frequently did



not come up to minimum suggested levels set in guidelines from the synod; and a valiant effort to maintain benevolent giving to extra-parish causes through synod benevolence. The latter amount was to be accomplished by means of a percentage of the annual budget set aside for such a purpose – an amount that was, sadly, often reduced due to a shortfall in income.

There were times when special festival offerings, intended for benevolent causes, were diverted – usually accompanied by the pastors voicing regret and apology – in order to make up deficits created by local expenses.

The concern about financial stewardship proved to be perennial. As late as 2009, Pastor Schneider voiced a concern about faithfulness in underwriting ministry costs. In the context of a nationwide economic downturn, he wrote, “Our mission has three challenges: first, to be unapologetic about the Bible’s message of stewardship; second, to find ways of supporting those

## Everlasting Debt?

This history of St. Paul’s congregation has at many points been a story of indebtedness in the cause of expanding and enhancing ministry. Frequently the debt has lingered long after the reason for its having been undertaken has been completed. Virtually every time a building project or expansion has been approved, there has been a combination of fund-raising and borrowing. Any shortfall from a targeted funding campaign has been covered by long-term indebtedness.

The slogan seems to have been, “If we build it, they [the stewards in this congregation] will come [and pay for it].” Sometimes paying down debt has taken what has seemed to be a painfully long time. When the gothic sanctuary was completed in 1907, a \$13,000 debt remained to be paid off (including interest, it was actually \$15,000).

A generous steward within the congregation offered to donate \$1,000 if the other members would contribute the rest in short order. The

affected by job and income loss; and, third, to be prayerful and engaged citizens who actively advocate for the common good, as our consciences dictate.”

A chart published in the previous year’s annual report indicated that one-quarter of the membership was providing less than three percent of the congregation’s income while less than four percent of the faithful were shouldering nearly twenty-one percent of the expenses. While such statistics sometimes fail to acknowledge that a fortunate few may be blessed with considerable financial wealth, it is sobering to note how many members carried so little of the congregation’s burden.

The year 2010 gives example of difficult choices sometimes forced upon leadership. That year was a time of particularly-painful retrenchment at St. Paul’s, given current financial realities. Salaries for staff were frozen and line-items in the parish budget were reduced.

congregation met the challenge. But lagging “regular stewardship” soon saw a new deficit take hold. Not wishing to enter its twenty-five year celebration with an unpaid debt, members accepted the challenge of subscribing a special “jubilee fund.” Again, the debt was retired.

When the parish house was constructed in 1940, financial pledges did not cover the projected cost. The congregation borrowed \$20,000. With accumulating interest, the amount grew to \$23,000. Diligent efforts were launched to eliminate this burden. Some pledges had been made but not honored. Many of these were, in time, fulfilled. New members were encouraged to pledge as well, and some who had already been paying their promised amounts agreed to increase them. The shortfall was refinanced at a more favorable interest rate. The debt was gradually, over several years, paid off.

Substantial debt was also incurred when the new school building was constructed in 1963-1964. Again, pledges were solicited in advance.



Stewardship dinner, 1975. A poster on the wall reads, “Is your stewardship dollar growing with inflation? Give a cost-of-living increase in your pledge!”

The congregation, again, was generous in response (although some pledges were never paid). As late as 1971, the congregation was carrying an indebtedness of nearly \$129,000. While the full amount was eventually paid off, it proved until then an ongoing burden to a congregation simultaneously paying salaries for three called pastors.

The largest indebtedness ever incurred by St. Paul’s was that for the new Narthex Annex, a project costing well in excess of \$3 million.

## A well-endowed Congregation

One of the most visionary decisions made by members of St. Paul’s was the establishment of an endowment fund. With the principal balance invested and not available for spending down, the interest accrues in perpetuity, funding ongoing ministry projects. In addition, St. Paul’s has wisely invested a significant portion of its endowment funds in the Mission Investment Fund of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a program designed to make affordable loans to ELCA congregations and mission starts.

The Faith Forever Endowment Fund was created in 1972 as part of the congregation’s one-hundred-year celebration year. As the congregation approaches the 150-year mark, the total

Once again, pledges were received in advance, but borrowing was still required. During Pastor Bergren’s short tenure, an energetic effort was made to retire the unpaid balance. Significant additional assistance in this effort came in the form of unexpected generous estate gifts.

It seems almost miraculous to realize that, as the congregation moves into its anniversary year celebration, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church is debt free.

assets in this fund exceed \$9 million. Even in years when donations to the fund from members are relatively small, the size of the endowment and the interest levels achieved by the managing board have resulted in the growth of the fund by over \$100,000 a year. Much of this success is due to skilled management by a knowledgeable board, large estate bequests and a favorable interest return on principal.

Much if not most of the annual distribution from the endowment fund benefits St. Paul’s Lutheran School. Congregants wishing to designate for other causes are free to do so (but undesignated funds default to the school budget).





Old Main on the Wartburg College campus was erected in 1880, eight years after St. Paul's congregation was founded. Originally conceived as a school to train male teachers for Lutheran parish schools, Old Main served at the outset as the only campus building. Some decades ago an elderly alumnus recalled his student days in Old Main – dormitory space in the attic, dining and classroom facilities lower down.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Church and Wartburg College

*(This chapter was prepared by Linda Moeller)*

### A mutual interdependence

The 1852 founding of Wartburg College preceded the 1872 founding of St. Paul's congregation, but Wartburg had several homes before it moved to Waverly in 1879. Almost immediately, the college and the congregation, both affiliated with the Iowa Synod, developed what Dr. Gerhard Ottersberg described in his centennial history of St. Paul's as "a mutual interdependence."

In those formative years, St. Paul's struggled to retain a pastor and benefitted from Wartburg professors willing to serve in that role. Wartburg needed a place for students to worship and relied

on St. Paul's to serve as a host congregation. The church eventually acquired its own building and pastor, but the relationship with Wartburg continued. Students were active in church activities, including music groups and Luther League. College faculty and staff joined the congregation and served in a variety of leadership roles. Several congregational presidents were Wartburg faculty members, and Alfred Swensen, longtime Wartburg professor of chemistry, served for 30 years as chairman of the Sunday School.



## The other Wartburg

In 1894, another Wartburg College affiliated with the Iowa Synod opened in Clinton, Iowa, offering a four-year bachelor's degree program on a more expansive campus in a larger town. The synod moved Waverly's college program to Clinton but kept Wartburg Normal College and Academy in Waverly, continuing the teacher-preparation program and adding what became an accredited high school program. Eventually, the Waverly campus also offered courses in business (some taught by Floyd Culbertson, father of current St. Paul's member John Culbertson). Often, eighth-grade graduates of St. Paul's School completed high school at the academy, then took business courses at Wartburg Normal College before obtaining positions in the community.

The two Wartburgs operated in parallel for nearly 40 years. Then, shortly after the Iowa Synod became part of the American Lutheran Church, Depression-era money woes led to a 1932 vote that merged the two colleges at Clinton. Wartburg Academy closed, and the Wartburg

## St. Paul's pivotal role

Longtime Wartburg College alumni director Jan Striepe, who is a member of St. Paul's 150th Anniversary Committee, said strong opinions existed in both Clinton and Waverly for keeping Wartburg College in the community. "A group of church folks, especially from Illinois and Wisconsin, favored the Clinton location," Striepe said. "There were also strong feelings that it should be in Waverly."

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the strong bonds between St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Wartburg College than the 1934 church convention at St. Paul's, at which a decision was made that brought Wartburg back to Waverly.

The 1934 ALC churchwide biennial convention met in Waverly, a fortuitous choice influenced by the efforts of Pastor Roland Schlueter



*The main building at Wartburg College in Clinton, Iowa*

Normal College teacher-preparation program moved to Clinton. The Waverly campus – which by then included Old Main, the west wing of Luther Hall, Grossmann Hall (for men), Wartburg Hall (for women), the gymnasium (now known as Players Theater) and North Hall (dining hall with rooms for men on the second floor)– shut down at the end of the 1932-33 academic year.

and St. Paul's church leaders, who favored moving the college back to Waverly. Convention sessions met in the church sanctuary. Delegates were housed in Grossmann Hall on the Wartburg campus.

Ironically, it fell to the women of St. Paul's to prepare housing accommodations for a convention at which no women could vote. They cleaned, rounded up sheets, blankets, quilts, towels, soap and other essentials to make the dormitory rooms comfortable and welcoming for the all-male delegates.

St. Paul's also fed the delegates. The October 6, 1934 issue of the Lutheran Standard, official publication of the ALC, noted that delegates and visitors to the convention would be "properly fed from the bounty of the land" and that Waverly

farmers had been asked by Pastor Schlueter "to do their bit by providing 50 bushels of potatoes, 100 chickens, 10 cases of eggs of 30 dozen each and 50 quarts of milk per day."

The late Will Leisinger, whose widow Audrey remains a member of the congregation, was one of the Boy Scouts from St. Paul's who served as convention couriers, carrying messages to and from the church and the campus. Families with

## Waverly seals the deal

For ten years after the consolidation in Waverly, Wartburg's location remained in limbo. In 1945, St. Paul's member Gus Niewohner (father of current St. Paul's member Lois Coonradt) helped settle the situation once and for all. Striepe said Niewohner, owner of a local hardware store and then president of the local Chamber of Commerce, often told the story of how a local banker,

## Sharing Facilities and Staff

St. Paul's early service to Wartburg College as a host congregation for students began a tradition of collaboration and sharing between the two institutions. When longtime organist E.G. Heist resigned, a contractual arrangement provided that music faculty members would serve as organist and choir director, while the church would make its organ available for college use. Warren Schmidt, professor of organ and theory,

## School-College Partnerships

Over the years, partnerships between St. Paul's School and Wartburg College have benefited students of both institutions. When the school first introduced physical education classes in the 1950s, college students served as part-time, paid instructors. For a time, the school offered German on a voluntary basis with instruction provided by Wartburg students under the supervision of the college German department.

automobiles provided taxi service for the delegates who came by train.

At the end of the convention, St. Paul's efforts bore fruit. Delegates voted to reopen the campus in Waverly in the fall of 1935 and to close the college in Clinton. However, unhappiness created by that decision simmered for many years as people maintained loyalty to their original alma maters.

having heard a rumor that the college was moving back to Clinton, approached him and said "we've got to do something."

The community subsequently raised \$100,000 to keep Wartburg in Waverly, and St. Paul's stepped to the forefront by guaranteeing to cover any pledges not fulfilled by its members. (Niewohner died in 1996 at the age of 101.)

began his long tenure as St. Paul's organist in 1950. C. Robert Larson, professor of music, took over the church choir in 1953. Students often sang in the choir, and college choral groups were invited to perform at services, a tradition that has continued. Expanded facilities at the college, notably the opening of Neumann Auditorium in 1960, allowed St. Paul's to hold large worship services and school programs on campus.

When the American Lutheran Church showed interest in expanding Christian Day Schools in the 1960s, Wartburg and St. Paul's began exploring ways to meet the demand for trained teachers. At that time, Wartburg was the only ALC college located in a community with a Christian Day School. The college proposed a new Lutheran Elementary Teacher Curriculum that would utilize St. Paul's School for practicum. Because not all teachers at the school had



a four-year degree or had taken a college course in religion, Wartburg offered free tuition to help St. Paul's teachers prepare for their new roles in this partnership.

By March 1966, Donald Vetter, consultant for Lutheran Schools, reported that 18 Wartburg students had entered the new program. Vetter became the ALC's Christian Day School director and founding director of the American Lutheran Education Association. His office was located on the Wartburg campus, and he also served as a part-time member of the education faculty. When he retired in 1984, Glenn Bracht, then

principal at St. Paul's School, succeeded him as director of schools for The American Lutheran Church (by then, a merger had added "The" to ALC nomenclature, and Bracht's office moved to church headquarters in Minneapolis).

Wartburg education majors continue to complete field experiences and student teaching at St. Paul's School, although the college no longer offers a curriculum specifically for Christian Day School teaching. Stephanie Rieckenberg, a Wartburg graduate who did her student teaching at St. Paul's, currently teaches fifth grade at the school.

## Steeple to Steeple partnerships expand Wartburg-St. Paul's interaction

In 2002, Wartburg College received a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Foundation focused on "Discovering and Claiming Our Callings." One of the grant's signature achievements was establishment of the Center for Community Engagement, which brought together existing programs and new initiatives focused around service,

community outreach, and leadership. In many ways, the program enhanced and expanded the longstanding partnership between St. Paul's and Wartburg. Although the Callings Initiative ended in 2013, the "Steeple to Steeple" relationships it forged continue:

- Wartburg students who live in the dormitory complex known as The Residence and seniors completing a capstone course must fulfill a service component, and many of them get involved at St. Paul's, helping with mailings and programming for children and youth, especially the Saints Alive program on Wednesday afternoons.
- Wartburg students complete preprofessional internships at St. Paul's related to their major area of study.
- Wartburg communication arts majors get involved with publicity and public relations work at St. Paul's as part of their class work. They also work with St. Paul's students on a video project for the sixth grade capstone project.
- An Accelerated Ministry Program partnership between Wartburg College and Wartburg Theological Seminary involves ministerial students in local congregations, including St. Paul's.



The name, "Steeple to Steeple Program," connecting Wartburg and St. Paul's in recent years, is a reference to the towers of St. Paul's Church and Wartburg Chapel. The church and the college have developed significant shared activities in recent years.



The congregations of St. Paul's, Redeemer and Wartburg gather for worship together in the Wartburg Chapel in 2019 for "God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday, the ELCA's national day of service.

Hannah Hilgenkamp, St. Paul's director of communication and a Wartburg graduate, typifies the relationship between Wartburg students and St. Paul's. As a Steeple to Steeple partnership volunteer, she helped out with children's ministry and met Wartburg alumna Deb Bachman, director of faith foundation, who later supervised Hannah's senior internship. Hilgenkamp's senior-level Persuasion class had St. Paul's as a client and developed and pitched marketing projects for a variety of church and school initiatives.

"This gave me real-life work experience with a client and helped to build a strong resume," said Hilgenkamp, who now supervises Wartburg students in similar projects.

## Better together

The mutual interdependence that characterized the early history of St. Paul's Lutheran Church & School and Wartburg College has remained constant over the past 150 years, providing sustenance and support for both institutions and for the community in which they continue to prosper.

Interim pastor Mark Anderson summarized the relationship like this: "The congregation blesses the college by offering many opportunities for internships including in education, communication, and ministry. During an average year, some 30 Wartburg students receive some part of their practical education at St Paul's."



The German rendering of "A Mighty Fortress," Martin Luther's reformation hymn, appears on the wall of Wartburg Chapel, reminding visitors of the college's Lutheran heritage.





## CHAPTER 10

# The Church Confronting Crises

*A number of significant crises have challenged members of St. Paul's Church during its first 150 years. With varying degrees of success, all have been met and overcome. Six are enumerated here.*

### **The first schismatic crisis — A congregation nearly stillborn**

It is hard to imagine how a fund-raising event, with proceeds dedicated to a worthy cause like underwriting the cost of a church building, could go so badly awry. When members of the fledging congregation, still numbering only a hundred or so, organized a fair to raise funds for the purchase of a church building, they seem not to have consulted their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Gerlach.

It was the women's group at St. Paul's that conceived of the fair. Pastor Gerlach had misgivings – as did the president of the Iowa Synod, who advised against it. Gerlach permitted the fair to proceed, unaware that dancing would be featured. He attended the first day of the three-day event, and then withdrew. On the second day, dancing occurred. The pastor's wife was present, witnessed the scene – with alarm – went home and complained to her husband. Pastor Gerlach returned to the fair and shut down the dancing. Participants took sides. The disappointed faction withdrew from the congregation, taking the

gate receipts with them. They formed a rival Lutheran congregation and affiliated with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

The remaining members soldiered on, their already small numbers now seriously diminished. St. Paul's congregation could have collapsed in its infancy. It is to the credit of earnest souls determined to continue the enterprise that the faith community survived. In time, the rebel church lost members and eventually closed (partly because of their inability to secure a called pastor). Some of its number returned to St. Paul's. Others drifted away.

The breakaway congregation had demanded control of \$450 the women of St. Paul's had raised, mostly from receipts at the fair. A decision rendered by a civil court determined that the funds actually belonged to St. Paul's. (Instead of placing it in a building fund, however, the members used much of it to purchase land for St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery, still in use, on Twelfth Street SE.)



## The crisis of German-to-English transition

St. Paul's navigated the transition from German to English without serious rancor. There were challenges, however. Understandably, German-language members who spoke no English were resistant to giving up their native tongue. A natural transition would have occurred over time, as younger generations adapted to the American cultural scene. But that shift came more rapidly than expected, due to the entry of the United States into the First World War.

An anti-German hysteria gripped the country once the nation aligned itself with Great Britain in the conflict. War posters intended to stoke patriotic fervor, and even existential fear, sometimes pictured fanatic-looking German soldiers with slogans like "Stop the Hun! He's coming for you!" By extension, in the eyes of



With the funds retrieved from the breakaway group, St. Paul's congregation purchased land for this cemetery on Twelfth Street SE.

unthinking American super-patriots, anyone in North America who spoke German was believed to be a potential enemy agent.

Along with all other still-German-speaking faith communities on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, this growing hysteria directly impacted the members of St. Paul's congregation. In his history of the congregation's first one-hundred years, Dr. Gerhard Ottersberg summarizes the problem:

Hatred against [German-speaking congregations] manifested itself in capricious orders, regulations and sometimes laws demanding instant cessation of the use of German in services and schools; in spiteful, petty persecutions; in financial chicanery, especially in connection with War Bond drives; [and] sometimes in assaults on members or pastors, and in desecration of sanctuaries.

Ottersberg, a member of St. Paul's but also a Wartburg College history professor, once shared with his students a first-person recollection of the terror he personally experienced in this regard. He explained that his own father, a Lutheran pastor serving a German-language congregation, had an unexpected and unwanted Saturday night visitation from an unruly mob bent on punishing "German sympathizers." He

recalled the boisterous gang showing up after dark, wielding torches, and hearing them threaten his father with a taunt. Said Ottersberg, "They chided my father, as he stood facing them on the front porch, with the question, 'What shall we do with this kraut?' Came an answer from the crowd, 'Let's hang the d--- Deutsch [German] preacher!'"

No hanging ensued, and crowd eventually disbursed, but they left the Lutheran clergyman and his family shaken.

For St. Paul's congregation, the crisis was resolved in two ways. The war ended, and anti-German hysteria soon faded away. In addition, there was an acceleration within the congregation of transitioning to English-language usage at worship and in the school. English was introduced in tandem with German, eventually supplanting it.

Today, few remnants of the congregation's German-language heritage remain. One can

## The second schismatic crisis — Two congregations instead of one

The reality of schism in 1885 tested a fledgling congregation but did not destroy it. Neither did a similar threat which arose in the mid-1950s, although the results were very different in the second instance.

During the tenure of Pastor William F. Schmidt, a movement developed within the congregation to demolish the 1907 gothic worship center; to close down the day school; and to build a new worship center, drawing upon anticipated savings to be realized by closing the school. It was not a majority of members who supported this plan, but the supporters were both tenacious and persuasive.

Pastor Schmidt aligned himself with those endorsing the plan to move worship out of the German gothic sanctuary and into a modern structure for which tentative sketches had already been commissioned. In May of 1955 he penned an impassioned letter to church members, embedded within a descriptive booklet designed to make the case for a new church



read German inscriptions on the older stones marking graves in St. Paul's Lutheran cemetery. And, the German-language dedication panels still survive in stained glass, recognizing donors who gave the windows that still enhance the sanctuary. The great west window, depicting Jesus, Martha and Mary, reminds worshipers that it was a gift from the Frauenverein (Women's Society).

structure, and co-signed by Pastor Weiblen. Schmidt wrote, "We believe that this is our day. If we do not possess it now it is unlikely that it will come again in our lifetime."

Pastor Schmidt may not have realized what a hornet's nest of opposition he was stirring up. Nor had he realized the deep level of emotional attachment felt by many of the members. Some of them nurtured memories of life-changing events that had taken place in the historic structure. When a vote was taken, nearly a decade later, a majority turned down the plan and decided, first, to retain the existing sanctuary; and, second, to construct a new school building. That turn of events led directly to nearly 300 members of St. Paul's deciding to separate from the congregation in 1963, and to form their own separate Lutheran ministry elsewhere in the city. This was the beginning of Redeemer Lutheran Church, today a strong ELCA congregation on Waverly's west side.



Posters like this one whipped up anti-German hysteria in the run-up to the First World War.





The members of St. Paul's who departed in 1963 organized Redeemer Lutheran Church, now a strong ELCA congregation on Waverly's west side.

There was a good deal of bitterness and rancor over the departure of so many members. The circumstance led to the decision on the part of Pastor Schmidt to take early retirement and to leave the community.

In July of 1964, in an attempt to calm troubled waters, the two pastors then leading St. Paul's, Glen Gronlund and Richard Rehfeldt, signed a pastoral letter addressed to the members. The



An aerial view of the 2008 Waverly flood.

epistle, penned by Pastor Gronlund, admitted to constant turmoil and a troubled climate in the congregation but also called for healing. It urged members of St. Paul's not to demonstrate ill-will toward those intent on starting a new congregation. For some, that was not an easy call to answer. Over time, however, members of both congregations learned to work together as sister parishes in a strongly Lutheran college town.

There are signs that any lingering acrimony between St. Paul's and Redeemer have, by now, fully dissipated. In October of 1997, on the occasion of the 125-year anniversary of St. Paul's founding, members of Redeemer made a financial contribution to help with the celebration. In recent years, several families at Redeemer have enrolled their children at St. Paul's Lutheran School. Members of Redeemer have served on the staff of the school in the areas of music and foreign language instruction. The youth of St. Paul's and Redeemer have occasionally participated in shared activities in recent years.

### The crisis of Rising Water

St. Paul's Church has endured and survived a series of river floods. The Cedar River has overflowed its banks and threatened the church property at least nine times – most recently in 1961, 1965, 1999 and 2008. (Another significant river rise occurred in 2016, after a deflatable dam had been installed, removing any serious threat.)

Surely it must have seemed a romantic idea, in the first decade of the twentieth century, to locate St. Paul's stately worship structure nearly at streamside. Over time, however, the decision proved aggravating and costly. On more than one occasion, members raised serious questions about continuing to maintain a campus so near the flood-prone Cedar River. But, once the German gothic structure was dedicated in 1907, locating elsewhere became something of a moot point. The endeavor became, instead, to find ways to endure and survive rising waters whenever the river overflowed its banks and filled the

basement of the sanctuary (and, later, the Parish Hall and the school building).

Each time a river flood inundated the buildings on the church campus, members of St. Paul's stepped forward with dedication and energy. As the waters rose, walls of sandbags would be constructed to keep the water out. Sometimes this succeeded. More often than not, the water infiltrated and did its damage.

On every occasion when assistance was needed, non-members would also volunteer their services. Special recognition is due members of the faculty, staff and student body at Wartburg College, who volunteered countless hours and invested sometimes backbreaking effort.

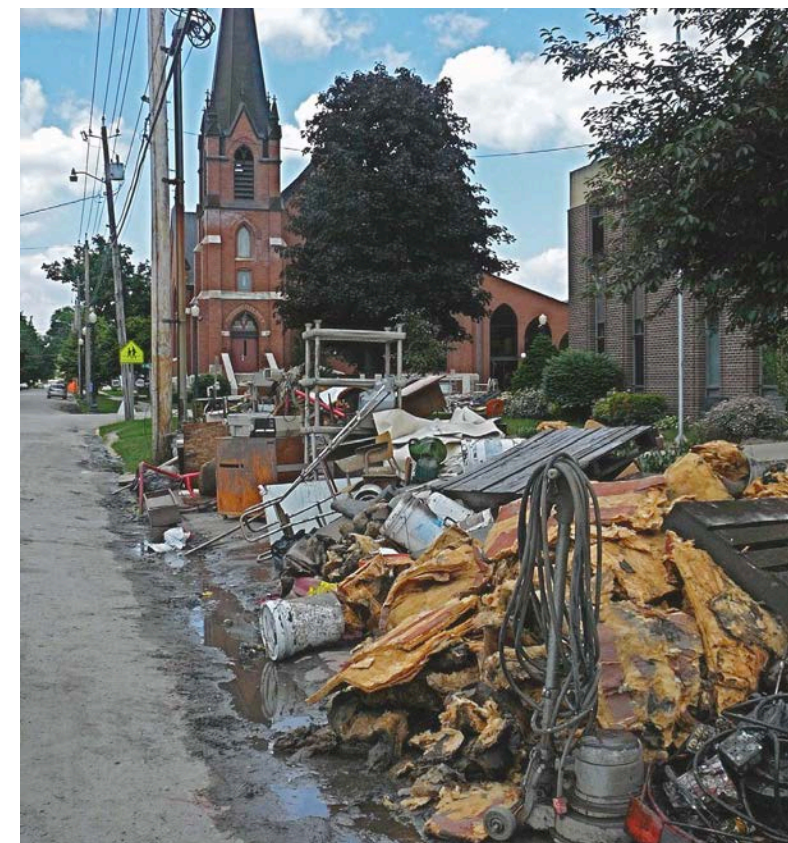
Following the 2008 flood, which spread across more than forty blocks of residential property and reached as far as the tennis courts on the north side of the Wartburg campus, Pastor Curt Schneider shared the frustration and relief St. Paul's members were clearly feeling. Speaking from the pulpit, he acknowledged the disruption and expense caused by the inundation. This writer remembers him remarking, sagely, "Please remember, friends: the Cedar River has been here a lot longer than we have as a congregation." (In retirement, Pastor Schneider remembered the quote somewhat differently. His recollection was, "The river has been here ten thousand years. Waverly's been here for 160. Go figure.")

Pastor Schneider recalls vividly the aftermath of the disaster, and how the congregation responded.

As soon as the facilities were accessible, volunteers within the congregation were ready to roll up sleeves and get into the muck. In a few weeks following the flood, several houses in the church neighborhood – and the Peace United Church of Christ [at the time, located on the same block with St. Paul's Church] – were no longer habitable and were eventually demolished. Several elderly members lost their homes along with contents and



A wall of sandbags were piled against the parish house doors during the rising waters of the 2008 Cedar River flood.



A mountain of trash was piled along Second Street NW following flood damage to St. Paul's School.



struggled to relocate. Where the waters reached, a lot of “normalcy” was washed away.

Following the 2008 catastrophe, the Waverly City Council and city administration took definitive steps to avoid ever again allowing such an

out-of-control water emergency in the city. As mentioned above, they authorized the construction of a deflatable dam which can be lowered at times of high tide, and which now keeps virtually all onrushing flood water inside the river channel.

## The crisis of confronting and embracing same-gender sexuality

With the creation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), St. Paul’s became a member congregation of a denomination with over five million baptized members. Not long after the ELCA came into existence, voices began to be raised concerning the church’s relationship to gay and lesbian individuals. A similar concern was being raised in the wider culture.

Between 1988, when ELCA was formed, and the turn of the century, public support for granting civil rights and marriage equality to same-gender individuals increased at a rapid pace. In 2009, voting members at the ELCA’s churchwide assembly in Minneapolis voted to allow same-gender candidates for ordination, individuals living in monogamous relationships, to be added to the denomination’s clergy roster.

The vote was a cliffhanger. The required two-thirds majority was achieved without a single vote to spare. The decision was not without serious consequences. A majority of the voters believed a responsible reading of Scripture allowed for such a move. They argued that it was a matter of justice and compassion. By contrast, a significant minority within the denomination opposed the decision. They argued their belief that Scripture is clear in showing that homosexuality is, at worst, a sin; or, if not a sin, then a serious human flaw requiring healing and repair.

In the years following the Minneapolis Assembly, approximately 20% of its members and congregations departed from the ELCA, either becoming independent or joining smaller, more conservative Lutheran groups. At least two breakaway Lutheran church bodies came into

existence at the time of this turmoil in the ELCA. Some parishes proximate to Waverly joined this exodus, including two congregations in Readlyn, and parishes in Manchester, Ackley, rural Hudson and rural Allison. Congregations in Strawberry Point and Monona split over the issue.

St. Paul’s navigated these choppy waters without major conflict and with little or no loss of membership. Pastoral leadership in the years before the decision was made helped members to understand the issue in the light of contemporary theological teaching, especially on the part of religion faculty at ELCA colleges and seminaries. Religion faculty at Wartburg College, who were also members of St. Paul’s, assisted in this process.

Pastors Schneider and Sandberg were serving the congregation when the change took effect. Schneider explained why, in his judgment, St. Paul’s congregation did not experience conflict following the ELCA Churchwide Assembly’s decision. He enumerated four reasons:

First, the congregation has been confident enough of its identity as the baptized people of God that it could address controversial and complex social and political issues and, in the process, grow from it.

Second, Pastor Burk authored his PhD thesis at the University of Iowa on the same-gender topic and facilitated discussion of difficult issues at St. Paul’s.

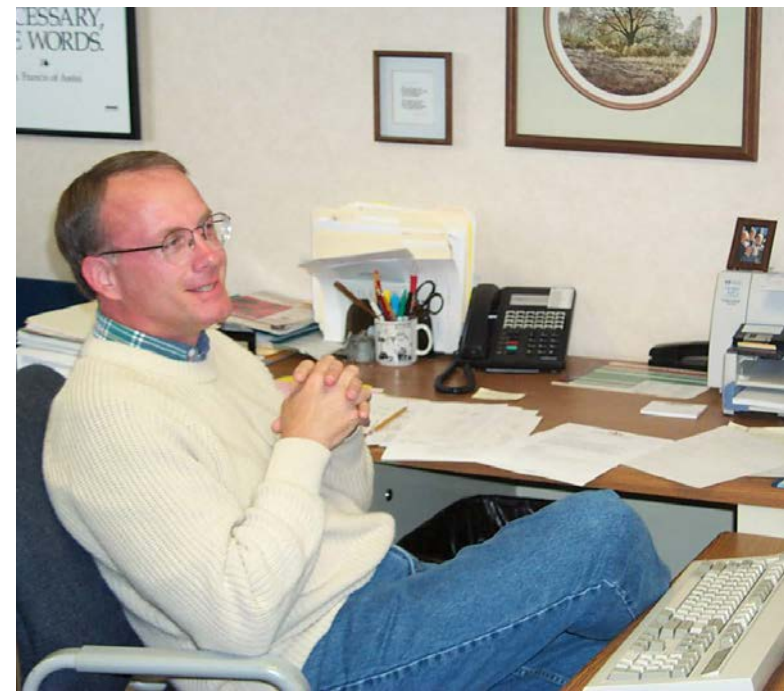
Third, as the Human Sexuality Statement took shape, draft and study documents were sent to congregations for comment and

input, I was particularly grateful to Wartburg ethics and religion faculty for the ways that they guided lively and informed discussion of successive study documents at Sunday forums. Participants realized that the Scriptural and social issues were complex, and that persons of good will and faith could “agree to disagree.”

Fourth, families with gay and lesbian children or relatives did not feel stigmatized at St. Paul’s; in fact, their quiet witness of love for gay and lesbian family members was persuasive.

Pastor Schneider preached on the topic of dealing with conflict, during which time he included ways to think about caring for one another in the midst of controversy over same-sex relationships. He described what happened next:

We pastors then scheduled Sunday forum times to review the Social Statement. Copies were made available to anyone who requested one. The church basement was packed for the first forum. The document under discussion affirmed four conscience-bound positions on the matter of same-sex relationships. The lack of a definitive consensus in the ELCA was mirrored at St. Paul’s. Attendance at the other scheduled forums dwindled. When all was said and done, one family



Pastor Burk helped members of St. Paul’s address questions related to same-gender sexuality during his tenure in Waverly.

and one older person made it clear that they disagreed with the churchwide decision and transferred their membership from St. Paul’s.

In the humorous manner he was prone to display, frequently from the pulpit, Pastor Schneider shared this tongue-in-cheek reflection: “Actually, I recall more agitation and grumbling when the coffee-maker stopped working for several Sundays than whatever surfaced over same-gender matters.”

## The crisis of ministry in the time of global pandemic

St. Paul’s most recent (and, as of this writing, current) crisis concerns the world-wide spread of a health plague commonly known as COVID-19 (COVID in popular usage). The virus began in rural China sometime in 2019 and spread rapidly from one nation to the next. It began to appear in the United States in early 2020 and by March 2020 spared no state, county or city. Waverly and St. Paul’s Church and School were soon caught up in the COVID pandemic.

The watchwords quickly became: keep distance from one another; wash your hands; wear a mask; receive a vaccination against the virus; avoid indoor gatherings.

The consequences for worship and ministry at St. Paul’s and its parish school were immediate and widespread. Beginning in mid-March, the church and school campus was closed to all visitors; classes and meetings were cancelled; worship became virtual, with music



and proclamation broadcast over the Internet to members sheltering in their homes. (Radio broadcasts, begun decades earlier, continued.) Staff member Devin Wippermann rose to the challenge by shepherding the purchase and installation of new equipment enabling multi-camera broadcasts from the sanctuary to the homes of members (and, for that matter, anyone on the planet wishing to tune in).

Ron Zelle, Director of Administration, was charged as Safety Officer and directed to modify the physical arrangement of school classrooms with dividers and air purifiers to limit spread and remove virus-carrying aerosols in anticipation of the return to in-class operation, and shielding to provide for separation of students and staff.

As church members were gradually welcomed back, beginning on Easter Sunday 2021, precautions were taken. Distancing and the wearing of masks were strongly urged at worship events. A gradual move toward a more normal environment was interrupted by the arrival of the “Delta” virus variant which proved even more dangerous than the original strain. Additional precautions once again became the order of the day. As of this writing, even though limited attendance at worship has begun, the pandemic continues to preclude what was once considered “normal church life” at St. Paul’s.

Pastor Arthur Bergen described how, during his tenure, the congregation navigated the crisis: “The challenge was keeping God’s people safe. I said from the very beginning, ‘We will use science as a means of loving our neighbor.’ One good gift that came from the pandemic was St. Paul’s electronic presence online. Livestreaming is here to stay.”

An unanswered question raised by the pandemic is, “What will church life look like after the



As worshipers returned to the sanctuary during the COVID pandemic, face masks became the order of the day. Bell choir members, pictured here, scrupulously followed the protocol.

health crisis subsides?” Like every other Christian congregation, St. Paul’s has had to adjust to the reality that worship attendance has gone down, due to safety concerns. Simultaneously, the electronic presence of which Pastor Bergren spoke has made it possible for members (along with anyone else with an Internet connection) to worship “from a distance,” usually from the comfort of their own home. Some members of St. Paul’s have half-jokingly admitted that they have been known to watch the congregation’s worship services while still in their pajamas.

Will worship attendance patterns be permanently changed once the pandemic subsides? Will financial stewardship be negatively impacted? Time will tell. Regardless the result, the congregation will need to find creative ways to adjust to the new reality.



During the pandemic, this half-whimsical, half-serious logo surfaced.

## CHAPTER 11

# The Church as Living, Breathing Organism: Pilgrim Stories

(Material for this chapter was gathered by Linda Moeller)

*There are myriad stories of faithful service and discipleship that could be told within the faith community that makes up St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Here are nine from invited members, each told in his or her own words.*

### Barbara Zelle Anderson

My family’s relationship with St. Paul’s traces back to the 19th century, when Pastor Wilhelm Loehe from St. Nikolai Church in Neuendettelsau, Germany, organized a training school that sent Lutheran missionaries and pastors to serve German immigrants in the United States. Konrad Prottengeier, one of my forebears, was so moved by Loehe’s work that he sent his son, George Sebbald Prottengeier, to join this effort.



Barbara with her husband, Jim Anderson.



Under the leadership of Pastor Sigmund Fritschel, George Sebald Prottengeier and his sister Margareta were part of a group that arrived in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1854 to begin a school that operated alongside an existing seminary. Their parents immigrated to Iowa that same year. In 1857, the Iowa Synod moved the school and seminary to St. Sebald near Strawberry Point, Iowa. Sigmund Fritschel, who married Margareta, was called to serve there. Prottengeier enrolled at the seminary and joined the ranks of Iowa Synod clergy following his graduation in 1863. Fritschel and his brother Gottfried became an administrative team that provided leadership to the seminary during its subsequent moves from St. Sebald to Mendota, Illinois and back to Dubuque.

George Sebald Prottengeier's son, George SG Prottengeier, was born in Strawberry Point and moved to Waverly in 1887. The move was possibly prompted by the fact that he had an uncle here—Moritz Koeberle—who happened to be a charter member of St. Paul's Church. (Gottfried Fritschel married Moritz Koeberle's sister, Elise, thus creating another shirttail tie to my family.)

The Prottengeiers raised their family in Waverly, joined St. Paul's Church, and sent all of their children to the school. When construction

of the present church began in 1907, the family donated one of the stained glass windows, but the name on the window was apparently misspelled as "Pritengeier." It is located on the west side of the sanctuary, near the back.

My grandmother, Doralina Brandt Zelle, was the granddaughter of George SG Prottengeier, and she also attended St. Paul's School. She married Edwin Zelle, and their four children all attended the church and school. My dad Herb was the oldest of the four. He and his wife Elinore Wiebke Zelle raised four children, who also went to St. Paul's Church and School and were confirmed and married at St. Paul's.

I am the oldest of Herb and Elinore's children, and I married James Anderson. Our girls, Meganne and Christine, went to St. Paul's School (as did Meganne's husband, Christian Stafford) and were baptized and confirmed here. Meganne and Christian were married at St. Paul's. Now our grandchildren, Ava and August, are the sixth generation of the family to attend the church and school.

My grandmother Doralina and mom Elinore both taught at St. Paul's School. So goes the family legacy.



Dan with his wife, Mary Graeser.

farm to Waverly twice a day (three times a day when my sister was in kindergarten) so that we could attend St. Paul's. Mother and her Fedeler

## Dan Graeser

My grandparents, Fred and Martha Fedeler, moved to Waverly in 1915 from Cotton, South Dakota. According to family stories, they made the move because they wanted their children to attend a Lutheran school. My mother and her six siblings all graduated from St. Paul's School and were confirmed at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. My parents, Martha and Virgil Graeser, were married at St. Paul's. My sister and I were baptized and confirmed at St. Paul's. I remember that the river flooded on my confirmation day in 1961, and we couldn't use the east door to the Parish Hall.

Since school buses at that time didn't serve parochial schools, my mother drove from our

siblings had lived on a 14-acre farm at the north edge of town on what is now Bremer Road, so they often walked to school or went by horse-drawn carriage.

During my years at the school, the elementary classrooms met on each side of the Parish Hall, divided by the auditorium (it was not used as a gym in those years). Each room held two grades. Seventh and eighth grades met in the basement, and kindergarten met in a Kindergarten House, located on the property where the school now stands. Our playground was the north parking lot, and I remember we had a "no snowball" zone during winter recesses.

My seventh grade teacher at St. Paul's was my aunt, Hilda Fedeler, who for many years was the congregation's oldest member and Wartburg College's oldest graduate. She died in June 2021 at the age of 109. I think her course in Iowa history, which included information about the local area, was one of the best classes I ever took.

Buster Arns, who was married to my Aunt Lorena (also known as Short), was one of St. Paul's head ushers and trained me for the job when I was still enrolled at the school. In those years

## Dorothy Droste Hertel

*Dorothy provided this information on Sunday, Jan. 9, 2022. She died Monday, Jan. 11, at the age of 98.*

My father, Arthur F. Droste, and my mother, Marion Lizer, met at St. Paul's. Mother had lived at the Orphans Home in Waverly from the age of eight until she was 16. She then worked in Waverly, and I think she and Dad may have met at Luther League.

Four generations of my family have been involved with St. Paul's Lutheran School. My father, my brother Ed and sister Margaret, Ed's kids, and my kids went through eighth grade. My son Gary was in the last eighth grade class. His children went through six grades as well as preschool and kindergarten at the school.

ushering was a big job, because the church was always packed for services, and it took a lot of organization to make sure everyone had a seat.

My mother kept up the Fedeler focus on education by encouraging me to enroll at Wartburg College after high school. After graduating, I was drafted into the Army during the Vietnam War, and the faith fostered through the church and school sustained me through some tough times, including an injury that ended my military service. When I returned home, I ended up working at Lutheran Mutual (now CUNA Mutual) through a chance encounter at church with Don Berg, who told me about a job opening there.

My wife Mary and I were married at St. Paul's, and our two sons were baptized and confirmed there. They both graduated from the school, which by then included preschool, and went through sixth grade. Mary worked as the St. Paul's School secretary for many years and continues to volunteer there.

I can't remember a time when St. Paul's wasn't part of my life, and I am thankful for the many blessings I have received through this relationship.



Dorothy Hertel.

My family lived in a house on the east side of the church. It was moved to make room for the Parish Hall, which was dedicated in 1941. I attended school in a building that is now the Avenue of the Saints Animal Hospital. It was





located near the site of the current school and there were just two classes on the main floor. Elsie Mueller taught grades 1–4; Charlotte Becker taught grades 5–8. The basement served as a meeting room for the St. Paul’s women’s group. We received strong biblical training at the school, but I think the most important thing was that we learned how to be good to one another.

In my years at St. Paul’s, we had to take a county exam to be admitted to public high school. The test was also required for kids from country schools but not for public school students.

I was baptized, confirmed, and married at St. Paul’s, and my children were baptized there. During the early years at St. Paul’s, the men and women sat on separate sides of the church, but I remember that growing up, our family always sat together on the pulpit side. After Elmer and I got married, we moved to the west side of the aisle. I’ve noticed over the years that the east side is definitely fuller than the west side.

Except for nine months working in Washington, D.C. during World War II, I have lived in Waverly for all of my 97 years, and St. Paul’s has remained an integral part of my life.

*Dorothy Hertel’s family lived in a house on the east side of the church.*

## Ed Bahlmann

My two older brothers, two younger sisters, and I all graduated from St. Paul’s School, which at that time went through eighth grade.

Looking back, one thing I remember was that our physical education/basketball practice took place at the Lutheran Children’s Home gym. I remember being on the St. Paul’s “Eagles” basketball team and playing other schools in town (Lincoln, Irving) in what I assume was some type of grade school league. Sometimes, we also played at halftime of high school games!

One of my school highlights was that my cousin and I won the St. Paul’s doubles ping-pong tournament when I was in eighth grade. How exciting!



*Ed with his wife, Rose Bahlmann.*

I think I can remember most of my teachers at St. Paul’s, and I feel that my education was good and helped me develop into the person I am today.

I was baptized at St. Paul’s and special memories of the congregation include my confirmation, Luther League, and the train-ride to the church youth convention at College Station, Texas.

I also remember the pastors we have had at St. Paul’s: Pastor Fangmeyer, Dr. Schmidt, Pastor Buchheim, Pastor Gronlund, Rev. Weiblen and many more since. I have often commented that the list of pastors at our church reads like a “Who’s Who” of pastors in the ELCA. One who played an important role in my life is Pastor Dave Solberg. During his time here, I was on the [Congregation] Council and served as chairman of the Stewardship Committee. He had a great influence on me.

## Ellen Engelbrecht Bell

St. Paul’s has been many things to our family over the years. It has been a base for worship, community, and learning that is a constant in our lives. Many of my childhood memories are from school and worship, and some of my longest friendships started at St. Paul’s.

As a child, I overheard a conversation between a group of St. Paul’s parents, and one of them said that every student graduating from St. Paul’s goes forward with an angel in their pocket. This idea has stuck with me over the years as this metaphor so perfectly describes the experience that I have had. St. Paul’s gives you a quality education, a close support group, and a strong base of faith to carry with you and help you on the rest of your life’s journeys.

It has been a joy watching my children, nieces, and nephews starting their journeys with

I’m not sure whether they were school functions or congregational events, but I remember the picnics at Prottengeier’s woods. I also remember the little box of treats I got as a youngster at the Christmas Eve service. This past Christmas Eve brought back memories for me and my wife of a Christmas Eve 60 years ago. Back then, I had just been inducted into the Army. I was able to come home and attend Christmas Eve services in my uniform with my fiancée. We were married the next spring at St. Paul’s and will celebrate our 60th anniversary on May 27, 2022. In this 150th anniversary year for the church, we commented to each other that remembering Christmas Eve 60 years ago is just one of the many memories we have of St. Paul’s.



*Ellen with her husband, Andrew Bell, and children, Lucy, Walter and Violet.*

## Geneva Liebau

Back in 1958, Paul and I were invited to meet with the Rev. Dr. Schmidt prior to our marriage and my joining Paul’s home church. My first impression was a very welcoming experience. The church, of course, is very beautiful and

impressive in its own right; however, we all know the church is its people!

The school also drew my attention, as I had been baptized and attended Christian day school through the fourth grade at St. Peter’s Lutheran



in Westgate, Iowa. Paul and I were blessed to have our three children attend St. Paul's School. It was also an honor and blessing for me to serve on its school board and share its mission.

So it is with much emotion and touching memories that I share the joys of being a part of St. Paul's family and community of saints.

God's promises are evident all around us, and we feel His presence as we gather together: The light and love of Christmas, the miracle of Easter, the gift of Pentecost, and each and every birth, baptism, confirmation, wedding, and worship where we pray and sing praises! Blessings abound; God is with us.

This is a teaching church, and I feel fed; I continue to grow in my spiritual journey; scripture is taught—all because of pastoral leaders, servants, educators, and God's steadfast guidance. As seekers and sojourners, we continue searching for spiritual wholeness and stand on God's

## Lois Coonradt

I was the first woman president of St. Paul's congregation. During my term as president in 1985, St. Paul's called our first woman pastor, Evon Flesberg. In preparing for the congregational meeting to consider the call, I remember asking Bill Engelbrecht to nominate her and a woman to second the nomination so we would have leadership from both genders.

I also remember that the council was very set on not borrowing money for current expenses. That Christmas Eve we had a terrific snowstorm, and I remember thinking, "Oh, good grief, we're not going to get the money we need."

When our church was so large, we had some Christmas Eve services in Knights Gym at Wartburg College and, for a few years, we split the congregation in half alphabetically, with one group sitting in the church and the other group in the Parish Hall. I also recall that more than 1,000 people often attended Maundy Thursday worship. That was the first service I ever



Geneva with her husband, Paul Liebau.

attended at St. Paul's with my then-to-be husband Dale, who was a Methodist before we were married.

As a youngster, I remember the junior choir always had a candlelight service on the first Sunday of Advent. At that time, wooden panels separated the first row of pews from the altar area, and the candles would be lined up on the top of the dividers. Elsie Mueller, later Elsie Winter, directed the choir.



Lois Coonradt.

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I remember Alfred Swensen (Sunday School superintendent for 30 years) would always start Sunday School in the Parish Hall. We would begin with a hymn from "Hymns of Praise," the small light green Sunday School hymnals stored in the bookcases on each side of the stage. He would give announcements and a short message, and we would end with a prayer before going to our classes.

## Russ Jerome

We have experienced many memorable moments during our time with St Paul's Church and School. Two stand out for me. The first is worship. At the end [of the school's Advent worship,] the children encircle the congregation, hold hands, and sing "May peace be always with you." It's a truly touching moment and a tradition that I look forward to each year.

The second memorable moment is my wife Abby helping with Vacation Bible School. She often helped with food, and it was amazing the way the entire congregation came together to put it on. A couple of years ago, VBS had a Roman theme, and they served rat-on-a stick chicken. Kids loved it!

## Kyle Peters

St. Paul's has always been a welcoming place for our family. Jennifer and I remember how friendly everyone was right from the start at our new member orientation. We love the choices of service types and times. We have baptized four children in the church, sent one child through preschool and enrolled another for preschool next year. The core values of the church and school remain constant, and we look forward to raising our family in St. Paul's congregation for years to come.

I was asked to serve on committee in the 1960s that considered whether or not St. Paul's should construct a new church building. The committee ultimately recommended keeping the present sanctuary. Although it was a divisive decision, I am happy we preserved our beautiful building and all of the history it represents. I feel almost holy every time I'm in the church building.



Russ with his wife, Abby Jerome, and children, Cece, Liam and Emme.



Kyle with his wife, Jennifer, and children, Keaton, Brodie and Quinn. (Daughter, Sydney, not pictured.)





## CHAPTER 12

# The Church and the Future

St. Paul's congregation is not the faith community it was even 25 years ago. To say that church life and ministry have changed dramatically in the past 150 years would be a vast understatement.

Although few observers of the church scene could have recognized it at the time, a watershed moment for American Christianity arrived at the beginning of the 1960s. Congregations across the denominational spectrum had, almost without exception, experienced rapid – even phenomenal – numerical growth during the 1950s.

That growth peaked around 1960, after which a decline set in. It was imperceptible at first. In fact, St. Paul's marked its highest baptized membership in 1963. With 3,249 baptized members, the congregation had reached its high-water mark.

One clear indication of changing realities is the level of weekly attendance at St. Paul's. In a newsletter article penned by then-pastor Durwood Buchheim, in the mid-1970s, this declaration was made: "It is my goal to assure that weekly attendance at St. Paul's Lutheran Church does not drop below 1,000." By contrast, in



recent years (even before the arrival of the COVID pandemic) weekly worship attendance has occasionally dropped below 400.

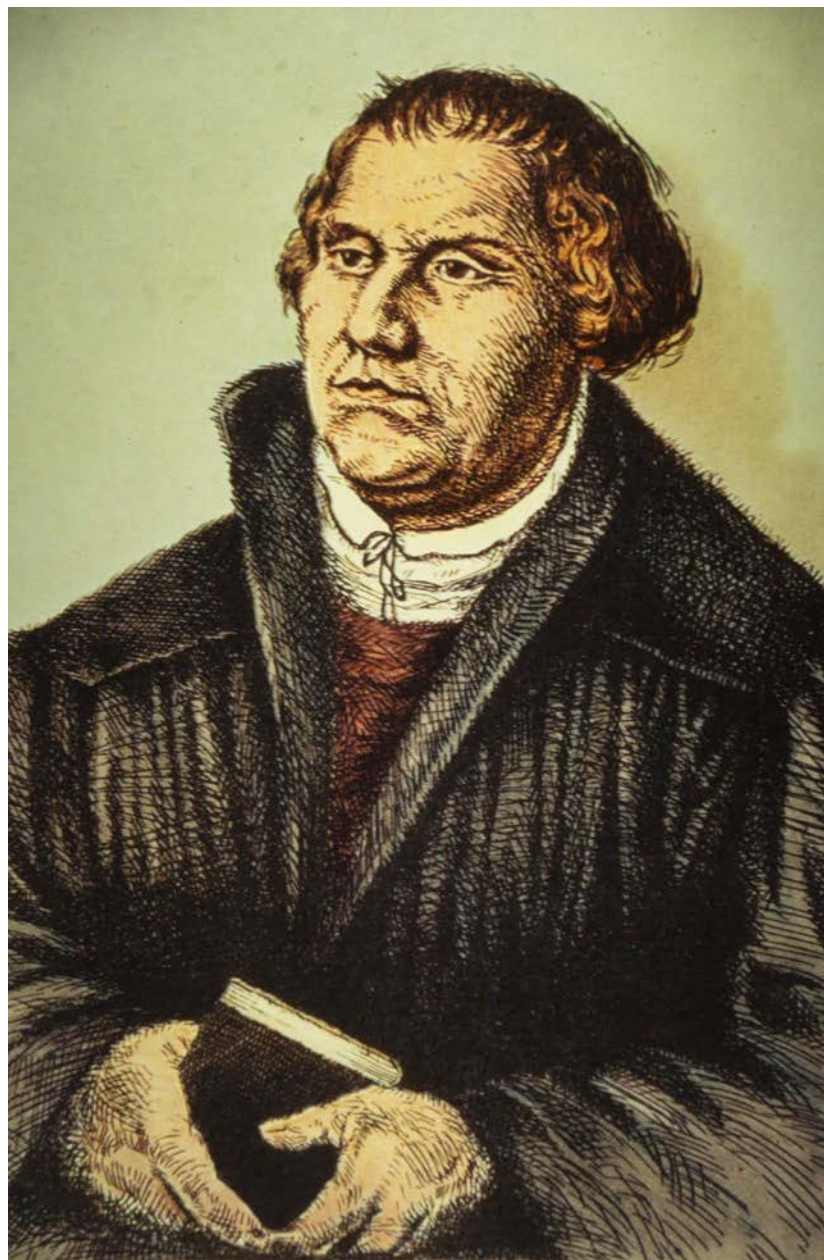
Already in his 1999 annual report to the congregation, Pastor Burk declared, “Numerically and in a variety of other ways, this congregation has either declined or remained static for the last decade or more.” In the twenty-first century, that decline has continued.

Burk went on to say, “The gospel of Jesus Christ does not change. But people’s lives are changing, and the whole church needs to respond.” Two years later, Pastor Burk offered this explanation for the continuing numerical decline in participation by members: “There are too many places to go and too many things to do.”

In 2012, Pastor Schneider compared the current ministry scene to riding as passengers on The Titanic, an ocean liner that was destroyed by an iceberg. He wrote, “Icebergs are the context for being church today. Changing values, media oversaturation, [shifting] loyalties, spiritual alternatives and packed schedules are the icebergs that we face.”

Early in his ministry at St. Paul’s, Pastor Bergren declared, “The church is not dying, but it is changing.” The changes to worship and ministry that soon came, with the pandemic of 2020-2021, were not what either he or the congregation had anticipated.

Changes in culture inevitably shape and influence religious structures and communities. St. Paul’s Church & School has clearly been shaped by cultural shifts, some of them profound. The future of the congregation will be influenced in important ways by the future of Christianity in this country and elsewhere in the world. For two millennia Christendom has prevailed in Europe and, more recently, the Americas. Christianity has been the culturally favored, default religion. This is no longer the case. In coming decades, successful Christian communities will surrender



*Martin Luther refocused the Western Christian Church on God’s reliable promise of unconditional grace (unearned love), an emphasis he found to be key in the letters from Paul the Apostle to first century congregations.*

the trappings of privilege, and embrace, instead, the pilgrim status from which they originated two millennia ago.

There are at least four dynamics that will shape the future of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, the ELCA and all of Christianity.

## Changing Understandings of Scripture and Theology

Lutheranism arose out of a crisis of theological misdirection. By the 1500s, Western Christianity, centered in Rome, had strayed from the Gospel assurance of radical grace – the promise that humans are embraced unconditionally by a loving God. Martin Luther led a rediscovery of a theology rooted in the letters of Paul the Apostle, one of the key writers of what became the Christian Scriptures.

Luther called for a return to reading and following “the plain meaning of Scripture,” something he insisted, with good evidence, that his own church (now the Roman Catholic Church) was not doing. Luther’s approach to Scripture could be described as “dynamic literalism” (some scholars would say “soft literalism”). He realized that what often sounds like literal history in Scripture sometimes needs to be read as metaphor or parable. For Luther, Scripture was almost a living organism.

It was Luther’s emphasis on “the Word [of God] alone” (*sola scriptura*), that provided the glue that held Lutheranism together. A century after Luther’s work, however, European Lutheranism entered into a time of biblical retrenchment. Probably in response to Roman Catholicism’s increasingly belligerent certainty about the authority of the pope, Lutherans created a theological defense for the authority of Scripture that some scholars have described as a “paper pope.” Biblical inerrancy and infallibility emerged from this striving after doctrinal certainty and, in time, became watchwords.

Lutheran immigrants to North America, including those who found their way into St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, inherited a conservative, often woodenly literal understanding of what the Bible says. What they left behind in Europe was a scholarly evolution leading to a rethinking of the nature and meaning of Holy Scripture. Much of this took place during the 1700s, as

part of an intellectual awakening known as The Enlightenment.

Questions asked and answered by Enlightenment theologians, some for the first time, included: Who actually wrote the books of the Bible? Why do the writers sometimes disagree with each other? Is there any real science in the Bible, or is Scripture not reliable as a book of science or history? Did God dictate every word of Scripture, or do these writings reflect the understandings of people of faith, searching for truth?

The Enlightenment rethinking had little or no effect on American churches – until the early- to -mid-twentieth century. By 1960, the three seminaries of The American Lutheran Church were embracing European insights into the interpretation of Scripture. These insights were typically not shared with church members by newly-ordained American pastors who entered into parish ministry – partly because some seminary graduates had misgivings about the newer approach; more likely, because sharing such insights with people in the pews would have caused alarm among some and hostility from others.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, it was no longer possible to avoid coming to terms with these insights. Scholars including Marcus Borg, Bart Ehrmann, John Dominic Crossan and John Shelby Spong sent forth from commercial publishers a flood of books challenging older ways of thinking about Scripture and calling for a new way of understanding. (One such publication was provocatively titled *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*.) A growing number of church members within Mainline denominations, individuals not theologically trained, began to read and affirm these theologians’ arguments. Lutherans in particular resonated with Professor Borg, rooted in Lutheranism and a graduate of an ALC college.



As St. Paul's congregation confronts the future, more contemporary biblical insights will no longer be able to be ignored. Younger believers are asking serious questions about the nature of God, the meaning and believability of miracles, and whether content in Scripture that appears to be historical is actual history, or instead

a form of theology (stories designed and told to make a faith statement). A new approach to understanding Scripture represents a serious challenge for congregations like St. Paul's, but it will be impossible to serve faithfully as a Pilgrim People in coming years without coming to terms with it.

## Changing Demographics

St. Paul's congregation once had burgeoning men's and women's auxiliaries, a thriving Sunday school, a large young people's organization, and a significant parish school with an enrollment consisting only of member families' children. (In fact, at one time children were required to attend the parish school for two years if they expected to be confirmed.) None of these are realities any longer. The congregation is aging, following a pattern evidenced by most Christian congregations in North America now, at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

While younger families, many with children, continue to affiliate with St. Paul's, this demographic is increasingly outnumbered in the congregation by older members, empty nesters, and residents of retirement communities. Simultaneously, many young people raised at St. Paul's do not choose to remain in the congregation after

the Rite of Confirmation. And, many young adults seem, these years, to be happily unchurched.

Demographic realities nationwide also impact churches like St. Paul's. National trends indicate that, among Americans descended from European immigrants, fewer adults are choosing to marry; of those who do, fewer are choosing to have children; and, among those who do, more are delaying childbirth and fewer children are typically being born. The implications are clear for congregations wishing to continue to grow and to welcome and retain families with infants and young children.

Old is not necessarily a negative. With age comes wisdom. Among St. Paul's older members, wisdom abounds. Can an older-age faith community find new and effective ways to function as a Pilgrim People? This is an important question for members to ponder.

## Changing Technology

In its first years, members of St. Paul's arrived at worship either by walking or in horse-drawn conveyances. A wood stove heated the sanctuary. Oil lamps gave illumination. A long-time Lutheran senior citizen was heard to say (now more than fifty years ago), "In my lifetime we've gone from horse-drawn plows in the fields and one-room schoolhouses – to landing an astronaut on the moon. It feels as though life is moving too fast."

The advance of technology shows no signs of slowing. In the 1950s the cartoon detective Dick Tracy wore a two-way wrist radio. Today a great

many youngsters of school age have even better technology – a cell phone, designed to accomplish far more than phone calls.

Television, automobiles, four-lane freeways, jet planes, communication satellites, laptop computers, the Internet, tourist trips to the edge of space – all of these technological advances have changed life on our planet. They have also changed the way members of St. Paul's congregation do ministry together and think about the world.

As late into the previous century as the 1950s, church folk depended on worship, youth

and adult fellowship groups and congregational social events to build and share community. If church-related programs and activities were the main source of entertainment, a significant change came with the widespread availability of television. With the advent of paved highways, and automobiles in virtually everyone's garage, weekend behaviors began to shift. It was no longer a given that church members would automatically show up at worship every Sunday.

The Internet has very possibly changed social behavior more rapidly and more profoundly than any other single phenomenon in our experience. We now use it as a library, an encyclopedia, a weather station, a post office, a meeting venue, a travel service, a movie theater, a shopping center, a banking outlet – and, in some cases, as a substitute for in-person worship.

## Changing Sensibilities

For generations, Waverly was a predominantly German Lutheran community. The city's surviving Lutheran institutions still bear witness to this. Today German is spoken only in a language classroom at Wartburg College. (During the writing of this history, the Wartburg College Library discarded for recycling a German-language set of the collected works of Wilhelm Loehe, the from-a-distance founder of the Lutheran Iowa Synod.) At this time in history, the Lutheran presence in Waverly is one faith expression among many. While families continue to affiliate with the congregation on a regular basis, it is no longer a given that citizens or newcomers in Waverly will seek out a church home at St. Paul's.

In addition, there is a growing tendency in American culture – something already in evidence in Europe a century ago – to distance one's self from religious practice altogether. The United States is growing increasingly secular. Surveys now show that the majority religious preference among youth and younger adults

While the Internet can assist congregations in reaching out to members and the wider community, it also offers a darker side. Unfiltered content on the Worldwide Web often includes misinformation and clear violations of the Eighth Commandment (as Lutherans count the commandments, number eight deals with telling the truth). Conspiracy theories and other sinister content make it more difficult for leaders of a faith community like St. Paul's to discern what members are ingesting and espousing when attempting to teach and preach the Good News effectively.

Can members of St. Paul's Lutheran Church see the advance of technology as a benefit and an enhancement to ministry, or will it be viewed as an impediment to be survived and endured? What will it mean to function as a Pilgrim People in an increasingly technological environment?

– in fact, increasingly among all Americans – is the category known as "nones" – those who, when asked their preference among numerous denominational choices, reply "none of the above."

Signs of coming change have been in evidence for decades. Already nearly fifty years ago, it was becoming increasingly difficult to involve young people in church-related programs because sports activities were taking priority. This writer recalls, generations ago, families absenting themselves from worship because parents were accompanying their children to soccer practice during the same hours.

It is now fairly normal on a Sunday morning to witness homeowners relaxing on their decks and patios, casually dressed; gardening; mowing the lawn; or hitching up the boat for a trip to the lake or the river. In the rural countryside, it is not uncommon to see a farmer behind the wheel of a tractor, cultivating crops at church time.

For many, worship no longer fits into the equation.





## Embracing the Future

St. Paul's Lutheran Church continues to be a strong and vital community of pilgrim saints. It will undoubtedly outlast and outlive many other congregations currently experiencing decline. There are signs of growth and creativity everywhere one looks within the ministry and membership of St. Paul's. The unusual mix of skill, intellectual curiosity and passion for mission among those whose names are included on the roster of this historically gifted parish make for a climate not often matched in a Christian fellowship. But there are storm clouds on the horizon. Current membership numbers are presently stable, and income continues to increase. But worship attendance continues to decline at a concerning rate. Ministry-as-usual will not be a viable option in the years to come. Challenges to viability and effectiveness are now descending upon St. Paul's congregation with head-spinning rapidity.

At the very beginning of Christianity, faith communities were small and nearly invisible. Their commitment was strong and their impact profound. In the midst of a highly-secular environment, seemingly against all odds, those communities literally changed their world. St. Paul's Church might well take inspiration from their example and experience. It is possible to survive and thrive as a Pilgrim People in a highly secular world. It will happen only by the energizing Spirit of the One in whom believers live and move and have their being – the Living God who promises unconditionally to love us into the possibility of loving others, and who will never let us go.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**

*Next page: The Gospel of Luke describes the journey of two Easter pilgrims, walking the Emmaus Road toward an uncertain future. The risen Christ empowered them, as he does each of us, for a pilgrimage toward ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. This adventure is pictured in the great east stained glass window in St. Paul's sanctuary.*





# ST. PAUL'S

# 150



1872  
2022

## Living God's Love: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

The St. Paul's Lutheran Church & School 150th Anniversary Committee first met on a cold Saturday morning in late January of 2020. One more in-person meeting was held in late February, and then March and the pandemic halted the work. Thankfully, some work was done virtually, and the committee gathered in person again in May of 2021, meeting outside. We celebrate our 150th year by welcoming back to preach 13 of our former pastors, a celebration weekend, a school homecoming weekend, a fall festival, along with other special events and activities.

The 150th Anniversary Committee includes: Ann Benschoter, Bonnie Drenkow, Bev Folkerts, Jo Groth, Pam Hinrichs, Jim Infelt, Meredith Keelan, Ron Matthias, Fran Mueller, Jan Ott, Jan Striepe, Cathy Voigts; and co-chairs, Dani Gordon, Mary Beth Zelle and Jean Buckingham. The year of celebration could not happen without the hard work of the dedicated St. Paul's Lutheran Church & School staff — many thanks to each of them.