

EMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN TEMPE, ARIZONA:  
A POOL OF THE GOSPEL IN A RIVER OF PEOPLE

by

Joel Lillo

Church History A  
Professor Fredrich  
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Those people who have spent any time around Pastor Daniel Pautz from Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Tempe, Arizona know exactly how he describes the city of Tempe. His favorite description of that city which numbers about 135,000 people is "a river of people as opposed to a lake." There is a lot of truth to his characterization. Tempe is a very mobile community with people moving in and out all of the time.

If you talk to people who have lived in or around Tempe for most of their lives (and those are few and far between), they will tell you that if you had seen the city thirty years ago and were just coming back to see it today, you would not know that it was the same city. Tempe, Arizona is a city of great change.

Yet in this busily moving community, there has been for the last 38 years a constant confessional Lutheran voice--Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Wisconsin Synod. Emmanuel has stood the test of time and has put up with a constantly changing community to become one of the largest Wisconsin Synod churches in the greater Phoenix area (or "The Valley of the Sun" as the people there like to call it). It has done so through a remarkable consistency of leadership and an unshakable commitment to the word of God.

The congregation started small as most congregations do. The nucleus of Emmanuel actually came from the Missouri Synod. In the year 1951, it was the general policy in the Synodical Conference that the Missouri Synod "took" California and the

Wisconsin Synod "took" Arizona. So when a group of Missouri Synod Lutherans in Tempe wanted to have their own church, it was natural that they turn to the Wisconsin Synod to supply them with a pastor and a church. (Pautz interview). The Synod responded by assigning the task of serving these people to Pastor Walter Diehl.

Pastor Diehl had graduated from the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin in 1934. From 1934-1950 he served in Elkhorn, Wisconsin. In 1950, he was called to organize Redeemer Lutheran Church in south Phoenix. While in his second year at Redeemer, he was asked to help organize the Wisconsin Synod preaching station in Tempe. Eventually, Tempe became the church which he served full-time. In 1956, Pastor Diehl was called to serve Emmanuel full-time and he left the service of Redeemer. (The Tempe Daily News, 1956).

Pastor Diehl (or P. D. as some of his members liked to call him) continued to serve Emmanuel faithfully right up until 1968. All of those members who knew him as a pastor and who are still in the congregation remember him very fondly. One thing in particular that all those who knew him say is that he was an extremely busy man. Pastor Diehl was a man who firmly believed in visiting his members often. Member Terry Duerst remembers Pastor Diehl's concern for the spiritual well-being of his members in that he would visit any of his members who missed a Sunday at church "usually on the Monday or Tuesday of that week. You never got the feeling that he was trying to put you to shame, but that he was genuinely concerned that something

might be wrong (Duerst interview)." Ben Jaeger remembers that he would never overstay his welcome on his visits: "He almost never parked in the yard, always in the street. And when it was time to go, he just got up and went (Jaeger interview)." In this way, Pastor Diehl always kept personal contact with his congregation.

Another thing that occupied much of his time was his work among the college students at Arizona State College (later University). The files of the church have a few newspaper clippings from the early days of the congregation describing the activities of the Martin Luther Society—studying the Lutheran confessions, hosting fellowships at the psychiatric ward of the hospital, etc. Work among the college students at that time was a natural thing to do since the church was at that time only about a block away from the college campus.

Emmanuel first held services in a school building at the corner of University and Mill Avenue. The building was no longer being used as a school because it was partially condemned. Mrs. Lydia Schaefer, the first organist for the congregation, remembers it being a rather primitive affair and especially remembers the old pump organ which was all they had for music at that time. (Schaefer interview).

The congregation saw very early on that it would need better facilities for its 60 baptized members (Reports and Statistics, 1952). So in 1952, they purchased a lot of land on the corner of 7th Street and Myrtle, just north of the college. On this lot of land there stood a 30' X 30' garage.

For the better part of a year, the members worked hard to refurbish this garage to serve as their church. They added carpeting and built some of the sanctuary furniture themselves.

On May 3, 1953, they were ready to dedicate their little chapel for the Lord's service. Pastor R. H. Zimmerman of Glendale was the preacher for this service. The seating capacity of this church was about 100 but it could easily seat more than that since the church had no pews and the members simply squeezed in as many folding chairs as they needed (The Tempe Daily News, May 2, 1953).

Emmanuel steadily grew during this time. The Books of Reports and Statistics for the Wisconsin Synod show that the congregation increased in size by about 15 to 20 members per year (Reports and Statistics, 1952-1963). Not only was Emmanuel continually gaining members, but it was gaining some members from a fair distance away from the site of the church. Since there was no Synodical Conference church in the city of Mesa to the east of Tempe, Missouri and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans from that city would drive all of the way to Emmanuel for service.

By September of 1957, there were enough Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in Mesa to begin a church out there. On September 15, 1957, Pilgrim Lutheran Church was formed in Mesa. For the first 11 years of its existence, Pilgrim formed a dual parish with Emmanuel in Tempe. Both congregations were served by Pastor Diehl while they were joined together. This arrangement

kept Pastor Diehl very busy. On Sunday he would serve at a 7:30 service at Emmanuel, a 9:00 service at Pilgrim, and a 11:00 service at Emmanuel again. Besides that, he was of course constantly visiting his members from both congregations. By November of 1959, both congregations had grown to the extent that they were both able to become self-supporting congregations and were taken off of mission status. (The Tempe Daily News May 7, 1960).

Emmanuel had grown up to include 192 baptized members by this time and it was evident that despite a 1956 addition of 360 square feet to the church building, they simply needed more space. To help remedy this need for space, the congregation purchased two and one half acres of land at 715 West Southern Avenue. At the time, there were a few in the congregation who wondered if this was the best place to build. After all, Emmanuel was up to this time a city congregation and the move to Southern Avenue would put the church squarely in the country. Southern was, at the time, a gravel road about a mile south of any development in the city of Tempe. The city basically stopped at Broadway and there was nothing around the future site of Emmanuel but farms of cotton, wheat, alfalfa, and sugar beets.

Eventually, the congregation saw that this was a wise move even though it did not appear wise to some at that time. Today, Emmanuel sits in the middle of a residential area right on one of the major streets in Tempe (Pautz interview).

A building committee got together and by late 1962 the congregation was ready to build. They contracted Robert Oakley, Timber-Lam, Incorporated to design and build the structure. They laid the cornerstone on an unusually rainy day in early 1963. The congregation met inside the unroofed structure and the choir sang in their rain coats (Jaeger interview). The building, when completed, was 103' X 40' and the peaked roof rose to a height of 29½ feet. They dedicated the structure on June 2, 1963. Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, chairman of the Wisconsin Synod's Board for World Missions preached and Pastors I. G. Frey and Charles E. Found (who had succeeded Pastor Diehl at Redeemer in Phoenix as pastor) served as liturgists. (This new building cost \$56,000 and) could seat 325 people, even more if the rear partition were pulled back and the back fellowship area filled up with chairs. (The Tempe Daily News June 1, 1963).

It was shortly after this that Emmanuel faced its only real crisis in its history. When the Wisconsin Synod split with the Missouri Synod, there were a number of members of Emmanuel who had originally come from the Missouri Synod who simply could not understand this. They lost a number of members at this time who split off to help form Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church LCMS. The statistics tell a little of this story since the time period from 1963 to 1964 was one of the only year periods when Emmanuel's baptized membership went down (from 130 to 118). This loss was especially felt among the leadership of Emmanuel. Much of the church council left and a new member Darwin Bacon, attending

attending only his second voters meeting, was elected president of Emmanuel (Pautz interview).

Throughout the rest of the 1960's, Emmanuel and its sister congregation Pilgrim in Mesa continued to grow but at a slightly slower pace than before. In 1967, Emmanuel built a long, narrow building just to the south of the church to serve as Sunday School rooms.

By 1968, the two churches had grown to such an extent that it was getting hard for Pastor Diehl to care for the members of both as he wanted to. It became more and more apparent that each congregation really needed its own pastor. Pastor Diehl really did not want to have to choose between the two congregations which he served, so when he received a call to serve Calvary Lutheran Church in Dallas, Texas in April 1968, he accepted that call (Pautz interview).

June 1968 marked a milestone for Emmanuel and Pilgrim. They became two separate parishes and each received its own pastor. Emmanuel called Pastor Daniel Pautz from St. Philip Lutheran Church in Milwaukee and he accepted the call.

Pastor Pautz was excited and relieved to receive this call. He had graduated from the Seminary only the year before and had been serving St. Philip for less than a year. At the time he received the call to Tempe, he had a move to the Southwest in mind. Doctors had told him that if his wife Marilyn, who has arthritis, would stay in the cold climate of Wisconsin for one more year, she would become wheelchair-bound. Pastor Pautz gladly accepted the opportunity to serve the Lord in



a climate which would be much healthier for his wife. He certainly did move to a warmer climate that year since 1968 is on record as being one of the all-time hottest summers of record in the Valley of the Sun (Pautz interview).

Pastor Pautz arrived determined to see the congregation grow; and through the seventies and eighties he has seen just that. He picked up where Pastor Diehl left off and showed a continuing commitment to visit and keep in contact with all the members over the years. The members of Emmanuel on the occasion remark how lucky they are to have had such remarkable consistency in leadership from the beginning. Up until 1988, Pastor Diehl and Pastor Pautz were the only two full-time ministers that Emmanuel ever had and this has led to a remarkable consistency in an area which continues to be marked by rapid change and growth. consistent.

At first, there were a couple of things that surprised Pastor Pautz about his assignment. One was the extreme heat which he really was not expecting. Another was the rural setting for this "city" congregation. The property immediately to the east on occasion had up to 800 to 900 sheep grazing in the winter which added a new dimension of sights and smells to the Christmas services. There were also crickets. Boy, were there ever crickets! There were crickets crawling up and down the walls of the church and almost drowning out his sermons on occasion (Duerst interview).

One of the projects that occupied a good deal of Pastor Pautz's time in the early years of his ministry was the formation

of Emmanuel's Christian day school. The first plan for a Christian day school was proposed in 1971. The plan called for the formation of a Tri-Parish School with Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Mesa and Salem Lutheran Church in Scottsdale. They were far enough along in the plans to call a principal. However, at the meeting to call a principal Pilgrim in Mesa announced that they had decided to go out on their own and start their own school. The Tri-Parish School suggestion was then no longer to be carried out (1971 Annual Report).

Emmanuel, then, had to wait for its Christian Day School. It did not have to wait long, however. The voters decided in 1972 to go ahead and start a school of their own. They called Miss Kathleen Barfknecht to be the first teacher. In its first year, the school had only the first four grades, had an attendance of 20 students, and met in the back fellowship portion of the church building. One problem that faced the school almost immediately was the sickness of Miss Barfknecht. Only two weeks after the beginning of school, she became quite ill and required surgery. Fortunately, there were a number of women in the congregation who were qualified to teach school such as Mrs. Joseph Worischeck who helped teach while Miss Barfknecht recovered from her surgery (1972 Annual Report).

In 1973, the school grew dramatically. Grades 5-8 were added in Emmanuel Lutheran School's second year. The congregation called Mr. Michael Wiechmann as the school's first principal and he saw the school through its first few years until he took a call away in 1977.

The school also grew dramatically in area in 1973 when the congregation completed work on the school building. They expanded the Sunday School building to the south of the church building so that it contained at that time two larger classrooms and a good-sized area to be used for fellowship. The cost of the project was \$65,000. The door was now open for rapid growth for the school (1973 Annual Report).

The Seventies saw tremendous growth for Emmanuel. In 1970 there were 220 souls at Emmanuel. By 1974 there were 405. By 1977 there were 486. And by 1979 there were 517. The school grew quickly also so that by 1975 it became necessary to add a third teacher to the staff. Miss Barbara Groehler was called to teach grades 1-2, Miss Barfknecht then taught grades 3-5, and Mr. Wiechmann taught grades 6-8. As the seventies wore on and the church and school continued, the need for more space and land became more apparant (1979 Annual Report).

As the need to purchase land became greater, the church attempted to buy land to the east around the year 1975. The owner of what was then farm land wanted \$70,000 for his 2½ acres of land--more than Emmanuel was able to afford at the time. The church then set its sights on the west, but the owner of that property wanted to sell either all of his vast portion of land or none of it at all. Finally, Emmanuel looked to the south and bought 1.35 acres of land for \$33,000 in 1978. This gave the church 3.85 acres in all and also gave them a very long and narrow strip of land (Pautz interview).

Emmanuel also grew out in another direction in the seventies. Noting that there were quite a few families who were coming to Emmanuel from Chandler, a good distance to the south, Emmanuel helped form another sister/daughter congregation. In December 1976, Emmanuel helped form Calvary Lutheran Church in Chandler. The church in Chandler grew very quickly so that by July 1977 they were able to call their own pastor (up until that time, Pastor Pautz served Calvary also). The statistics show that Emmanuel lost members going from 1977 to 1978 and this was caused largely by the formation of Calvary in Chandler (1977 Annual Report).

It was also about this time that the area around Emmanuel's church building on Southern started losing its rural flavor. In the late seventies, the area was being subcontracted into a residential community. It was at this time that several members came to Pastor Pautz with a suggestion. Their suggestion was this: The congregation would sell the parsonage at 904 Roosevelt and Pastor Pautz would buy his own house in the new subdivision near the church. There were several reasons for their suggestion: 1) They had seen ministers who were related to them retire with no place to retire to. 2) He could now be closer to the church. 3) People could now more easily find him since there were 3 major streets called Roosevelt in the Valley of the Sun and not everyone knew exactly which Roosevelt he lived on. The voters and Pastor Pautz agreed to this and the church sold the house on Roosevelt and Pastor Pautz bought a house at 717 W. Manhattan, south of the church (Pautz interview).

The educational program of Emmanuel continued to expand. 1977 saw the addition of a kindergarten program. In 1978, Emmanuel helped form a new area Lutheran High School--Arizona Lutheran Academy. Emmanuel was one of the early enthusiastic supporters of the school and remains so to this day. In the present 1988-1989 school year, Emmanuel has more students attending ALA than any other congregation in the federation: 34 (1988 Annual Report).

In the Annual Report for 1979, Pastor Pautz summed up the previous decade and looked ahead to the new decade of the eighties with these words: "It is not likely that Emmanuel shall experience the same amount of growth in the 80's as it did in the 70's. To be sure, I would expect continued growth but at a decreased rate." There was every reason to believe that he was right about this. After all, the number of souls attending Emmanuel had more than doubled in that decade going from 220 to 517. Also, the city of Tempe was practically filled up by this time with almost no room left for expansion. To the congregation's pleasant surprise, though, Emmanuel continued to grow in the eighties at almost the same rate as it did in the seventies going from 517 souls in 1979 to 880 in 1988 (1988 Annual Report).

So as the eighties began, there were two areas that Emmanuel spent a lot of time trying to improve: the need for more space and the need for more pastoral help. The first thing that the congregation did in the eighties as a step toward improvement in these areas was to improve the added property

which they had recently acquired. In 1980, the members undertook a massive landscaping project for the property to the south. Using only volunteer help, they expanded and repaved the parking lot, built an attractive playground area for the school, re-contoured the back land for more effective irrigation, and planted literally hundreds of plants. They planted juniper bushes, olive trees, sumac, eucalyptus, ash, carob, and bottle (1980 Annual Report).

In late 1982, Emmanuel took a step to help relieve the ever-growing work load of Pastor Pautz. They found out through District President Nitz that Pastor Charles E. Found from Douglas, Arizona was retiring and might be interested in serving a congregation on a part time basis. They extended the call to Pastor Found to serve the congregation on a third time basis and he accepted. Interestingly enough, Pastor Found went back in the history of Emmanuel quite a ways. He served Redeemer Lutheran Church in Phoenix after Pastor Diehl left that congregation for Emmanuel. He helped Pastor Diehl a good deal in the early years of Emmanuel and had helped in the dedication service for the church on Southern (1983 Annual Report).

Pastor Found is a handyman extraordinaire. He is an electrician/plumber/painter/carpenter/film maker/missionary/world traveller. Most of these talents were put to use by the congregation in 1984 when they did expansion work on the church building. In a \$1400000 project the members enlarged the sanctuary, redid the balcony, added carpeting, and got new pews. They also added new church offices and a fourth classroom for the school. (1984 Annual Report)

This addition greatly enhanced worship since it increased the area for worship greatly and did away with the partition in the back, the need to set up many chairs for the services, and the need to reset the area for kindergarten for Monday morning again.

As was noted before, this addition added a fourth classroom for the school. This means that the congregation also called a fourth teacher for the school. They called Roger Sievert who replaced Paul Bartelt as principal. At this time, Mr. Sievert taught grades 7-8, Mr. Duane Behm taught grades 5-6, Mr. Jay Storm taught grades 3-4, Mrs. Lois Pomerence taught grades 1-2, and Mrs. Karen Behm taught Kindergarten. Later, Mrs. Behm was chosen to start a preschool program for Emmanuel in 1988 (1984 Annual Report).

The work continued to increase in the eighties so that it was evident that even with the help of Pastor Found, more help was needed. The next step for Emmanuel was to call a vicar. The congregation tried to call one in the spring of 1986 but there were not enough vicar candidates to supply all of the congregations which applied for a vicar for the first time, so Emmanuel went without one that year. In the spring of 1987, they tried again and this time they got one. Mr. Joel Lillo was assigned to serve Emmanuel from 1987 to 1988. Throughout the year, Emmanuel became aware that what it really needed was a second full-time pastor. The vicar program was ended after that year. Pastor Pautz spent most of that year trying unsuccessfully to get Vicar Lillo married off (1988 Annual Report).

So it was decided to call a candidate from the 1988 graduating class of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as assistant pastor. That year, the assignment committee assigned Pastor John Sprain as only the third full-time pastor in Emmanuel's history. At that time, Pastor Found completely retired from the ministry. Pastor Sprain was excited to begin work in Tempe since he has roots in Arizona (as it seems nearly all of the called workers in the Arizona-California District do).

What does the future hold in store for Emmanuel? That question, of course, can only be answered by the Lord. If the future is anything like the past, there will be continued growth, continued struggling with the problem of space and possibly more manpower. More worries about the budget which now comes to over \$400,000. But most of all, there will be more spreading of the living water of the gospel into the river of people in Tempe, Arizona.



ANNUAL STATISTICS OF EMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN TEMPE, ARIZONA

YEAR	MEMBERSHIP		BAPTISMS		CONFIRMATIONS		OFFERINGS
	BAPTISED	COMMUNICANT	YOUTH	ADULT	YOUTH	ADULT	
1952	60	37	5	2	2	2	\$2728
53/54	83	52	6	2	2	3	\$3640
55/56	130	74	16	2	6	3	\$5254
1957	156	82	7	2	2	5	\$6642
1958	170	97	14	4	2	3	\$5582
1959	192	120	21	1	2	7	\$7732
1960	211	128	3	7	11	8	\$8283
1961	210	128	18	0	6	2	\$9182
1962	210	125	11	1	5	1	\$8291
1963	230	130	12	0	4	1	\$12,272
1964	216	118	19	4	3	4	\$10,276
1965	235	130	10	2	3	3	\$12,130
1966	257	140	16	1	4	4	\$14,700
1967	275	150	6	2	3	1	\$16,266
1968	260	160	5	0	3	1	\$16,160
1969	253	160	10	2	6	5	\$22,080
1970	230	150	5	0	1	5	\$22,728
1971	287	180	7	0	8	3	\$25,682
1972	305	206	10	3	8	8	\$34,820
1973	351	240	14	0	10	7	\$52,142
1974	405	275	14	0	10	10	\$59,347
1975	424	303	7	3	19	5	\$65,071
1976	464	385	22	6	11	12	\$75,350
1977	486	345	13	1	10	9	\$86,335
1978	483	353	22	3	16	4	\$101,143
1979	517	375	19	2	11	12	\$109,666
1980	549	402	16	2	9	4	\$147,746
1981	564	421	8	2	16	5	\$162,216
1982	560	418	15	0	14	6	\$207,858
1983	625	450	19	5	7	10	\$218,555
1984	698	501	17	5	14	11	\$270,331
1985	776	556	25	5	13	15	\$294,388
1986	792	581	21	3	22	11	\$339,257
1987	826	604	30	4	20	15	\$324,982
1988	880	643	34	5	14	17	\$371,909

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