

**Grace Lutheran's First Pastor:**



**Rev. Arthur W. Koehler, 1920-1945.**

Church History 338

Lance McMorrow

April 23, 2002

## I. Introduction

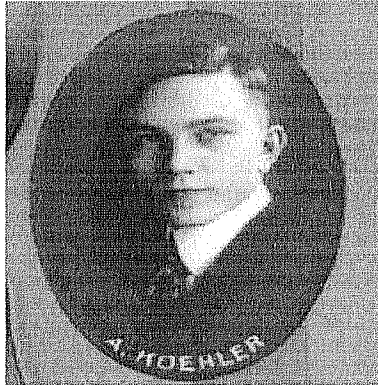
The booming stockyards and meat packing plants of South St. Paul were attracting people from all over the Upper Midwest and even Eastern Europe with its jobs. The town was growing and so was the need for a confessional Lutheran church. There was neither a Wisconsin nor a Missouri Synod church in town, so in the summer of 1920 the Mission Board of the Minnesota District of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin called a graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to start a new congregation. Actually, that year, two graduates were sent to the Twin City area. Christian P. Kock was called to start Mount Olive congregation in the Como-Snelling area of St. Paul. Arthur W. Koehler was sent to start the congregation in South St. Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Koehler was a very young looking twenty-two year-old single man. For the next twenty-five years of his life he would preach the gospel to the members of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church and many other visitors to the church on the corner of Eighth and Southview. Over this time period he would go from starting a small congregation who met in a “lemon”<sup>2</sup> of a chapel, to shepherding a large and growing flock which would worship in a big, new, and beautiful building that still stands today on the same corner. In his years at Grace Lutheran Pastor Koehler oversaw a building project, guided the congregation through the Depression and the Second World War, instituted a rigorous youth education program, and served the St. Croix Conference as Visiting Elder and the Second Vice President of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod. Throughout his twenty-five years of service Pastor Koehler won the respect and love of his congregation; a respect and love that is still spoken of fifty-seven years after he left Grace congregation.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and its Member Congregations*, (Minneapolis: Ad Art Advertising Co., 1969), 297.

<sup>2</sup> *God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*, (1996), 65.



*Graduation photo - Class of 1920  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Wauwatosa, WI*

## **II. Biography**

Johann Friedrich Koehler, commonly called Friedrich<sup>3</sup>, was the father of Arthur. (There is no relation to former Prof. John P. Koehler of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.) He came to the United States from Germany in 1886 at the age of fifteen with the intent of being part of the church expansion occurring in the U.S. Once in the U.S., Friedrich traveled to New Ulm, Minnesota and enrolled in the first class of the newly established Dr. Martin Luther College begun by the legendary Rev. C.J. Albrecht. Rev. Albrecht was pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran in New Ulm and president of the Minnesota Synod from 1883-1894. Not only did Friedrich graduate from Rev. Albrecht's new college, but he also became a son-in-law to him when he married his daughter Lydia.

Arthur W. Koehler was born to Friedrich and Lydia Koehler on July 16, 1898, in Hutchinson, MN, where Friedrich was serving as a pastor. The following year Friedrich moved his family to Nicollet, MN, where he served another Minnesota Synod congregation, Trinity Lutheran, as its pastor until he retired. It was in this south central Minnesota farming community that Arthur grew up.

---

<sup>3</sup> Luther Koehler interview – February 23, 2002.

Arthur had six other siblings to share the parsonage with: four brothers and two sisters. He and his brother Adolf followed in their father's footsteps. Adolf graduated from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and eventually became a Missouri Synod missionary to China and later the Chapel Dean at Concordia College in St. Paul, MN. Arthur and Adolf's two other brothers became pharmacists. The siblings enjoyed a good relationship and a good sense of humor with one another. A good sense of humor was a Koehler family tradition.<sup>4</sup> This served Arthur well as it carried through to his adult life and found its way into his sermons and confirmation classes.

Arthur Koehler went to college at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN, and eventually graduated from Concordia College in St. Paul, MN. From there he attended Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Wauwatosa, WI and was graduated in the spring of 1920.

Pastor Koehler was assigned to start the new congregation in South St. Paul. He arrived and initially boarded with the Gustav Krueger family, charter members of the congregation<sup>5</sup>. Pastor Koehler spent the summer canvassing South St. Paul and acquainting people with the new missionary project<sup>6</sup>.

Within the first few years of living in South St. Paul, he met his future wife, Florence Broders who was from St. Paul and a member of Emanuel Lutheran. Oddly enough, it was her hat that first attracted him to her.<sup>7</sup> Pastor Ernst of Emanuel married them on April 19, 1922, at Emanuel Lutheran. They would have four children. Robert was born in 1925 and is now a retired Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor. Luther and Cathryn, twins, were born in 1929. Luther is also a retired LCMS pastor and Cathryn a retired nurse. The Koehler's youngest child, Marion, was born in 1931 and is also a retired nurse.

---

<sup>4</sup> Luther Koehler interview - February 23, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Gene Knoch interview - April 13, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *Official Directory and Handbook of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church 1924-25.*

<sup>7</sup> Luther Koehler interview

“Concerning the birth of the twins: Arthur Koehler often noted the background to the naming of the twins, namely, that they were born in the Reformation month of October, in the Catechism Jubilee Year of 1929, and were baptized on the birthday (Nov. 10) of Martin Luther.”<sup>8</sup> Thus the twins were named after the reformer and his wife, Cathryn.

When an old time member of Grace was told that Pastor Koehler’s two boys had become pastors and his two daughters nurses, her response was: “I’m not surprised. That’s the kind of people they were. They served others.”<sup>9</sup> An attitude of service, humility, and love was the hallmark of Pastor Koehler and his family. Undoubtedly such an attitude was wrought by Christ’s love for them. *“We love because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19).



*Koehler family pictured in 1945<sup>10</sup>*  
*L-R: Cathryn, Robert, Rev. Koehler, Luther, Mrs. Koehler, Marion*

---

<sup>8</sup> Luther Koehler E-mail, - April 22, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> LaVern Swain interview – April 13, 2002

<sup>10</sup> Photo: *God’s Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 21.

### III. Making a Start and Growing

The mission congregation in South St. Paul got off to a good start. It had a strong nucleus of confessional Lutherans willing to work to establish a new congregation. Property was purchased on Eighth and Southview and the first chapel was built in the fall of 1920. After Pastor Koehler had canvassed South St. Paul during that summer and fall, it was time to have the first service at Grace Lutheran Church. It took place on December 19, 1920, when the new chapel was dedicated.<sup>11</sup> A brief historical sketch from 1924 describes the following events that took place during the winter of 1920-21.

Thus our new mission in South St. Paul had been launched. On Christmas Day, 1920, the first regular services were held, both German and English, with an attendance of 38. Regular services were continued in both languages during the holidays and on Sunday mornings until a nucleus had been gained with which a congregation could be permanently organized. This was done on March 6, 1921, as stated above. Due credit must be given to our "mother congregation," the Emanuel Lutheran congregation in St. Paul, for granting a release to a number of families living in this city, so that these people could join our mission congregation and thus help to build the Lord's Kingdom here on earth.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1923 the existing parsonage was built next to the first chapel. Within the first seven years of its existence Grace congregation more than quadrupled in size from forty-six communicant members in 1921 to 197 in 1928. Because of the increased membership a new sanctuary was necessary. This was built in the summer of 1928.

The Holy Spirit blessed the early efforts of Grace Lutheran under the pastorate of Rev. Koehler with continuing growth in membership. What started out as a group of thirty-eight worshipers on Christmas Day in 1920 would grow to a large congregation of over 1,200 baptized souls when Pastor Koehler left twenty five years later to serve Peace Lutheran in Hutchinson,

---

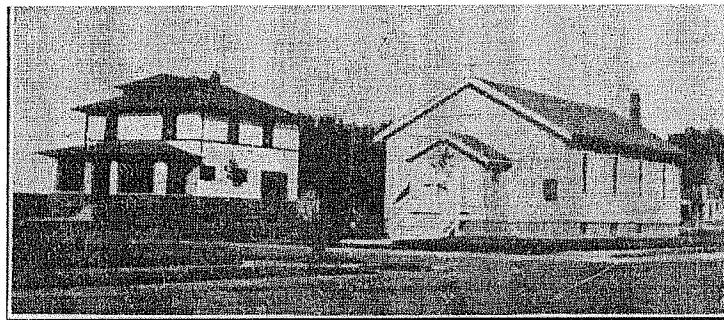
<sup>11</sup> *Official Directory and Handbook of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church 1924-1925.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

MN. Moreover, the Holy Spirit built and sustained Grace Lutheran so that, thousands of people would come to know Christ as their Savior and receive eternal life. From the initial work of one pastor and a handful of members, the church grew so that after seventy-five years:

2,980 people were baptized  
2,475 people were confirmed  
1,001 couples were married in the house of the Lord and  
653 people received a Christian funeral<sup>13</sup>

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,  
which a man took and planted in his field.  
Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows,  
it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree,  
so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches” (Mt 13:31-32).*



*Grace Lutheran: sanctuary and parsonage as it looked 1923-1928<sup>14</sup>*



*The new Grace Lutheran sanctuary built in 1928<sup>15</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> *God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Photo: *Official Directory and Handbook of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church 1924-1925*.

<sup>15</sup> Photo: *God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*, 2.

In regards to evangelism the modern pastor and lay person can learn something from Pastor Koehler's approach to evangelism. When his son, Luther, was asked if he thought his father was a great evangelist he said "no". But what he did say was that his father excelled at following up on leads. If someone was visiting church on Sunday, he would visit them at their home that evening. He said that his father made better use of his time than cold calling and knocking on doors. He had to be, since he had so many other responsibilities. Pastor Koehler was aggressive and tenacious when it came to tracking down leads on a possible member. Even if he didn't know a person's address, he would still try to track them down if they had visited church or had a child enrolled in the Sunday School.<sup>16</sup>

Pastor Koehler worked to inculcate in his members what we call today, "an every member mission mindset". He encouraged his members to greet and welcome visitors. Interesting enough, the following quote not only illustrates this point *and* shows how busy he was, but it also shows a pastor with an adept and gentle way of guiding his flock to take action and ownership of how things were to be done in the church.

In connection with our Sunday services I wish to draw the attention of the members to a condition which needs correcting. There are still many visitors and strangers attending our services every Sunday, yet these folks are almost entirely neglected. Nobody seems to bother himself about them. Our ushers seem to arrive about the time services begin and appear in the worship when the sermon has begun. Your pastor cannot greet the visitor as he is expected to <sup>be</sup> superintendent one of the largest Sunday schools in the city and to direct his choirs besides conducting the two services and preaching the sermons. Do you want a standing committee, or the elders of the church, or the chief usher with his assistant, to welcome the visitor and make him feel at home in our services, or do you wish to let the visitor come and go as he pleases? The larger our church attendance grows, the greater become the responsibilities of a good ushering staff. Our congregation dare not overlook this part [of] its church work.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Luther Koehler interview

<sup>17</sup> 1936 *Pastoral Report*, (January 18, 1937).



With all the work and sacrifice that Pastor Koehler made, along with the members of the congregation, to reach out to others and to grow their new church, a proper Lutheran perspective was maintained. The people of the congregation were reminded that all the credit for their success belonged to the Lord. The 1933 Pastoral Report concluded on such a note:

And after everything is said and done, who is actually responsible for all success and growth, for the increase in membership, in Christian knowledge and faith? Our Lord and God alone. In His strength and power our congregation has carried on for thirteen years, and if we remain loyal and faithful to Him, He will be with us also in the coming years and generation. *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”*, is his promise to His children here on earth. Let us follow Him at all times.<sup>18</sup>

The call to support and do the work of the church was a common theme that ran through Pastor Koehler’s articles in the Messenger and pastoral reports, even after the church had grown to be quite large. He seemed to always have a mission mindset about him. One doesn’t have to look too far to find his calls to attend church, to support and work for it, and to pray for it.

#### **IV. Education Excellence**

A remarkable feature about Pastor Koehler’s pastorate at Grace Lutheran was the amount of time and energy devoted to youth education. The commitment to youth education was first of all evident in the Sunday School.

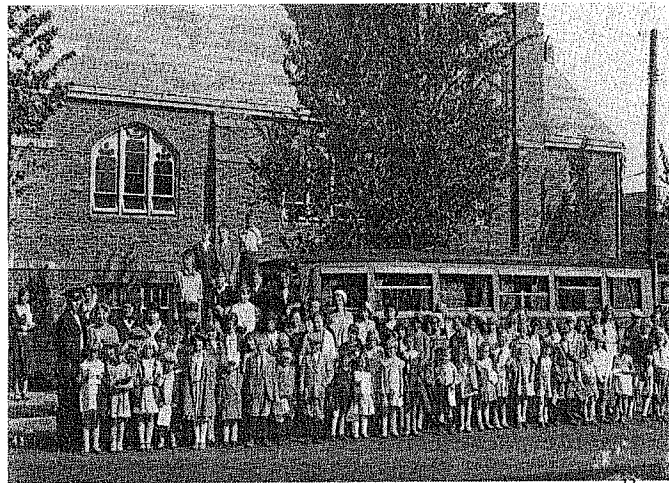
In 1926 the Sunday School did a remarkable thing for its day and age. It started a bus service in order to pick up and return students from Sunday School who lived in the farther reaches of town on the north and south ends. While a seemingly insignificant service, however, back in the days when few people had cars, this was a highly valuable service. It was viewed as

---

<sup>18</sup> 1933 Pastoral Report, (January 8, 1934).

the greatest advancement that the Sunday School made in its early history.<sup>19</sup> Over the years the Sunday School would become the largest in South St. Paul. At the end of Pastor Koehler's time at Grace the Sunday School had reached an enrollment of 370.<sup>20</sup> In later years it would reach the 500's in the 50's and 60's.

Under Pastor Koehler the Sunday School had a very definite mission mindset from its very beginning. Its 1933 history concludes, "There are still many children in our community who attend no Sunday School. These children are a challenge to us. So let us all work with a willing heart and soul, for 'the work done for the Lord is not done in vain'."<sup>21</sup>



*Grace Lutheran Sunday School and Bus, circa 1929<sup>22</sup>*

The commitment to youth education was also evident in confirmation classes. What is remarkable is that the number of times the confirmation classes and the other religious classes met was similar to that of a congregation with a parochial school. The eighth grade confirmation class met each week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons, and the seventh grade class met on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. In addition to confirmation instruction, there was

---

<sup>19</sup> *Grace Lutheran Church: The History of our Sunday School*, (1933), 1.

<sup>20</sup> *1944 Grace Lutheran Annual Report*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Grace Lutheran Church: The History of our Sunday School*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*, 9.

religious release training for these two grades on Wednesday mornings and the fourth through sixth grades met on Wednesday afternoons.<sup>23</sup>

One may speculate if this is one of the reasons why Grace never had a Lutheran Elementary school. Were the members content with the great amount of religious instruction that their children were receiving and didn't see a need for a Lutheran elementary school? Though the children received a good Christian education, it was the desire of both Pastor Koehler and his successor, Pastor Schaller, who writes below, to have a Lutheran elementary school. It appears, however, that finances were the obstacles to having a school, as is noted in Pastor Schaller's first address to the congregation in a voters' meeting as their pastor.

The greatest need of Grace Congregation, which I, coming in from the outside, can see, is a Christian Day School. This is nothing new to you, as you have this issue constantly before you in your constitution, and Pastor Koehler has also, according to reports received, kept this before your eyes and hearts. As we are living in times of greatest danger and temptation to true faith, we shall have to bend every effort for the sake of our children and the future of Grace congregation to start way. It was a good to start the Debt Liquidation Drive now. With God's help we shall not stop until the entire debt is wiped out, to set us free to do the important work.<sup>24</sup>

Finances were always tough at Grace in the early years. It would take the congregation almost twenty years to get off the synod subsidy it had started with, and that's with having almost a 1,000 baptized members towards the end.

Pastor Koehler enjoyed teaching and working with the youth. He has been described as a pastor who was approachable, who took an interest and liking to his youth, and would even tell jokes in class.<sup>25</sup> Yet he was not without discipline and enforcing rules with his youth. He was described as strict, but never harsh. He didn't allow running in church or chewing gum during

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Grace Lutheran Messenger*, Nov. 1944, pg. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Quarterly Report*, June 30, 1945.

worship.<sup>26</sup> More than one former member remembered Pastor Koehler stopping in the middle of a sermon to chastise a youth for horse play or gum chewing.

### **V. A Humble, Dedicated, and Gifted Servant**

One of the reasons I chose to research and write about Pastor Koehler was that I always heard so many good things about him from the people whom he served. Even those who never even knew him would tell me that he was a wonderful man based on what they heard others say about him. In hearing the accounts of his members and reading the congregation reports, it must be said that Arthur Koehler was a dedicated and humble servant who had a shepherd's heart. He would do all he could do for his members.

An example of his willingness to serve his members was when he preached for Mildred Boldt's funeral in 1934. Mildred Boldt was originally from Hankinson, ND. Pastor Koehler agreed to accompany the casket on a train from St. Paul to Hankinson, a distance of over 200 miles. Once there, he performed the service, preached, and served the family, many of whom were his own members who had traveled up from South St. Paul.<sup>27</sup>

Pastor Koehler served Grace congregation from 1921-45, indeed a difficult time in the world. Much of his service during this time also illustrates his humble and dedicated service.

Many members of Grace Lutheran suffered during the Depression. Times were tough financially for the fledgling congregation. When the congregation could not longer afford to pay the debt on the parsonage Pastor Koehler volunteered to do so.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, he agreed to a pay cut in 1933.

---

<sup>25</sup> Marlin McMorrow interview

<sup>26</sup> Laverne Swain interview

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Marmur interview – April 15, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Luther Koehler interview

During World War II many members also made many sacrifices by fighting for their country or sending a son off to war. During this time Pastor Koehler also made sacrifices for his congregation. Already busy with a congregation that had grown to over 1200 souls, he took on additional work to serve his members in the armed services. By 1944 he was keeping in contact by personal letters with each of his 110 members serving in the armed forces. In the first six months of 1944 he had written 405 letters<sup>29</sup>. Granted he had typists who helped him out, but this must have taken a great deal of time and effort to carry out for so long a time and to do it so thoroughly. Already busy, he would also add an adult confirmation class later that summer.<sup>30</sup>

Pastor Koehler no doubt deserved a much needed vacation, but he kindly explained in the church bulletin why he would go without one in 1944.

“The pastor is not taking a vacation this year for two reasons. First, it is impossible to obtain a substitute for the Sunday services because of the shortage of ministers and theological students. Secondly, a number of our boys in service will spend their last leaves and furloughs before going overseas, others are coming home for the first time after a prolonged absence, and many wish to receive Holy Communion while at home.”<sup>31</sup>

The above example is yet another example of Pastor Koehler’s shepherd’s heart; putting the interest of his members first, and his humble service.

Pastor Koehler was a hard working pastor. His son described him as a “workaholic”. He said that it was not uncommon to hear the typewriter going at midnight from his study. In addition to a good work ethic, Pastor Koehler was blessed with a photographic memory.<sup>32</sup> No doubt this, coupled with his work ethic, enabled him to accomplish a great deal of work.

---

<sup>29</sup> *Pastor’s Semi-Annual Report: Jan. 1, 1944 – June 30, 1944.*

<sup>30</sup> Church Bulletin: July 16, 1944.

<sup>31</sup> Church Bulletin: June 25, 1944.

<sup>32</sup> Luther Koehler interview

Pastor Koehler also coupled these gifts with his musical talents and conducted three choirs at various times in his ministry. The first choir at Grace Lutheran began in 1933.<sup>33</sup> Music was a joy for him. He loved to play the organ. His reports on the choirs, like the one below, were often brimming with enthusiasm and gratefulness.

A third choir was added to our congregation this last fall, the girls intermediate choir... Our choirs will be especially active during the coming Lenten and Easter season. There is no expense with the directing of these three choirs, as the pastor is giving his time to this end without any cost to the congregation. The expense of buying the necessary music has been kept very low this past year. Yet our congregation is receiving much fine music for its services, especially during the festival seasons of the church year, at almost no cost. Many congregations as large as our congregation, are paying fancy prices for the same service, as rendered by our choirs.<sup>34</sup>



*Pastor Koehler and the Senior Choir*<sup>35</sup>

---

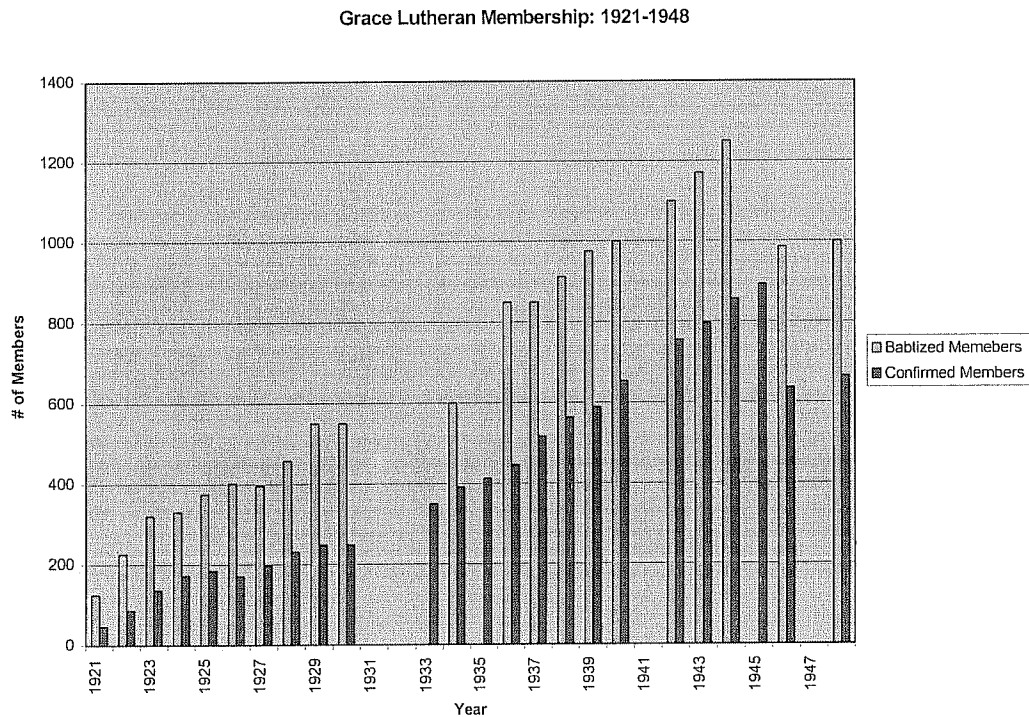
<sup>33</sup> *1933 Pastoral Report*, (Jan. 8, 1934).

<sup>34</sup> *Grace Lutheran Church – Annual Reports for 1937*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> *God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*, 12.

## VI. Problems Arise after Pastor Koehler Leaves

When Pastor Koehler left in the spring of 1945 to serve his call in Hutchinson, problems soon arose in the congregation. They seemed to swirl around the new pastor, Winfred Schaller. Indeed, Pastor Schaller had a difficult time in the three years that he was at Grace. These difficulties were reflected in the membership declines from 1945-1948.



Part of the reason, and maybe the primary reason for Pastor Schaller's problems was that he followed an immensely popular, dedicated, gifted, and kind pastor. I am convinced that any man would have had a difficulties in filling the shoes of Arthur Koehler, no matter how gifted, hard working, and kind he was. Arthur Koehler was the first pastor of the congregation and served a long time, 25 years. Humanly speaking, he was the first love, as far as pastors went, for many of the members of Grace.

Another reason for Pastor Schaller's problems has to be attributed to the fact that he tried to change too much too fast when he arrived at Grace Lutheran Church. As was noted earlier, in Pastor Schaller's first voter's meeting he was already proposing the idea of a Lutheran elementary school for Grace Lutheran. As noble of an endeavor as that is, and maybe even necessary for a congregation as large as Grace, pastorally it was unwise to make changes in a congregation so quickly upon arrival. Other changes that he made right away were procedures in renting out the fellowship hall. That may have been needed, but again, he opened himself to alienating the congregation and not giving them the chance to know and be comfortable around him as their new pastor.

It appears that another reason for Pastor Schaller's problems with the congregation was that he tackled some unpopular issues that needed correcting in the congregation. Sadly, these were doctrinal issues that needed correcting.

Pastor Koehler had, as his son described, more of a Missouri than a Wisconsin viewpoint on doctrine. It has been described that Pastor Koehler didn't see the difference on women's suffrage.<sup>36</sup> Reflective of this, is that after Pastor Koehler left for Peace Lutheran in Hutchinson, Grace's constitution had to be updated to reflect the Bible's doctrine concerning the roles of men and women in the church. (Note: Peace Lutheran was a Wisconsin Synod congregation that later became a Missouri Synod congregation in 1951<sup>37</sup>.) Under Pastor Koehler, women were permitted to vote in congregation voter's meetings. Following is a quote taken from a voter's meeting that makes a correction to the practice of woman's suffrage less than a year after Pastor Koehler's departure.

---

<sup>36</sup> Luther Koehler interview

<sup>37</sup> Dorn, O.A. ed. *The Lutheran Annual*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 198.



Women's Suffrage was the next business taken up. Article 6, paragraph 2 (QUOTE) of our Constitution dealing with this subject, had been declared inoperative in the July, 1945 congregational meeting and was to be taken up at this meeting. Since the Word of God is very clear and plain in the matter that women are to be silent in the church, and since the Synod as a body has at no time, and does not now endorse Woman's Suffrage in the Church, a motion was made and carried that this Article be stricken from our Constitution.

The Chairman then pointed out to the Ladies present and for all Ladies of the church that this resolution would not forbid them to attend our meetings, but he invited them to attend and listen in on our meetings.<sup>38</sup>

Pastor Koehler also was one of a group of pastors who wrestled with the issue of the Boy Scouts. It was at this time that the issue was being studied and discussed in earnest among pastors of the St. Croix Conference of the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Koehler represented the St. Croix Conference at the Synodical Conference Convention in Cleveland in 1944 to have the Boy Scout issue considered<sup>39</sup>. The Proceedings of that convention do not show any activity on that issue.

That Pastor Koehler ever promoted the Boy Scouts is doubtful. Grace Lutheran never offered the Boy Scouts as an activity. It appears, however, that Pastor Koehler allowed member families to have their children in the Boy Scouts. Though this is never documented, it is assumed by the author since this was such a big issue in the congregation after he left. Furthermore, since questions were raised if Boy Scouts could take communion, it seems such a practice had occurred and was then discontinued when Pastor Schaller succeeded Pastor Koehler.

The question is raised whether our synod has taken a definite stand against Scouting. It is stated that our synod has officially gone on record long ago, and last summer. It is admitted that there still are some differences. The question of communing Boy Scouts and a Scout leader is raised. The chairman [Rev. C. Koch: Visiting Elder] states he would instruct first and with great patience try to

---

<sup>38</sup> Minutes from the Jan. 21, 1946 Voter's Meeting

<sup>39</sup> Luther Koehler E-mail.

make the person concerned see the right stand on the Word of God....<sup>40</sup>

In his tenure Pastor Schaller addressed the Boy Scout issue with many Bible studies to show their anti-Christian teaching with their denial of objective justification. In spite of this, Pastor Schaller still received a lot of opposition from many within the congregation. This appears to be the first time that Grace ever wrestled with this issue. Prior to Pastor Schaller, the Scouting issue was not raised at Grace, at least not that could be found in the hundreds of documents that were researched.

Minutes from a special meeting that was held to address problems between Pastor Schaller and the congregation reflect the tensions regarding the Boy Scout controversy.

The pastor states that he is convinced the real reason for dissatisfaction has not been mentioned. He is convinced it is a difference on doctrinal matters, such as Boy Scouts, veterans' organizations, and the like. He states that the duty of all is to try to solve the problem according to God's Word. If then, having made an honest effort, things do not improve, a change will not doubt be made by the Lord himself..<sup>41</sup>

It is doubtful that this was the "real" or only reason for dissatisfaction. The numbers for attendance and donations were dropping because people were unhappy with Pastor Schaller's sermons. They apparently were hard to understand. Pastor Schaller also had a personality that seemed to turn people off. These things, along with some unwarranted dissatisfaction over his right stand on the Scouts, most likely led to congregational dissatisfaction.

The question is raised why the pastors [in the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods] are not agreed. Answer: they were grappling with the same question as the laymen. We see how attractive Scouting is and we do not want to discard it if we can possibly

---

<sup>40</sup> *Council Minutes from Special Congregation Meeting*, Jan. 28, 1948.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

retain it. But we find that scouting teaches wrongly on the matter of salvation.<sup>42</sup>

Pastor Schaller eventually left Grace congregation later that year to serve a call at Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac, WI. It seems that the problems and tensions between him and the congregation were too great for him to effectively serve as Grace's pastor any longer. He also served the Wisconsin Synod as its Synodical Secretary from 1945-1954,

It is sad anytime controversy and division erupts within a congregation. Yet, no doubt Grace became a stronger congregation as a result of turning once again to Scripture to solve such problems. Scouting would not be a part of Grace church life but its positive elements were eventually implemented with true biblical and Christian emphasis when the Lutheran Pioneers came into existence synod wide in 1959. Grace started its own Lutheran Pioneer Train in 1972.

## **VII. Conclusion**

One can only marvel as one sees the tremendous gifts, dedication, and love that Pastor Koehler had for his members. One can only thank God for blessing such a man and using him to build his kingdom. Grace Lutheran was blessed in so many ways by the dedicated service of Pastor Koehler. Yet, we need to remember that Arthur Koehler was a man who had his weaknesses as well. A clearer understanding and practice on the biblical doctrines of the roles of men and women and also church fellowship as related to Scouting would have averted some problems that Grace congregation went through after he left and would have been a clearer witness to the truth. Yet, we must not dwell on these weaknesses, nor should we forget them. We simply must accept them as a part of history and learn from them today.

Outside of this, humanly speaking, Pastor Koehler made great contributions to the foundation, purpose, and legacy of Grace Lutheran Church. It must not be forgotten that he

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

shepherded a flock of believers through some difficult times. He willingly made many sacrifices. He maintained a joy for the ministry and a love for his people as he led them to their Savior. He had this joy and love because he was a believer in that same Savior, Jesus Christ. He trusted him and his promises. He looked forward, along with his members, to seeing their fulfillment. The law and gospel were preached in Pastor Koehler's 25 years of service at Grace and still continues to this day at the church on Eighth and Southview. For this, thanks is due to God.

## **VII. Postscript**

Pastor Koehler went onto serve two other congregations:

Peace Lutheran (WELS: 1945-51, LCMS: '51-'53), Hutchison, MN – 1945-1953  
Bethel Lutheran (LCMS), St. Paul, MN – 1953-1967.

On July 19, 1979 the Lord called the soul of Arthur Koehler home to heaven. Eleven years later on Dec. 31, 1988 he called home to heaven Arthur's wife, Florence.

## Bibliography:

*1933 Pastoral Report.* January 8, 1934

*1936 Pastoral Report.* January 18, 1937.

*1944 Grace Lutheran Annual Report.*

*Council Minutes from Special Congregation Meeting.* Jan. 28, 1948

*Church Bulletin.* July 16, 1944.

*Church Bulletin.* June 25, 1944.

Dorn, O.A. ed. *The Lutheran Annual.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951.

*God's Amazing Grace - 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book,* 1996.

*Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and its Member Congregations.* Minneapolis: Ad Art Advertising Co., 1969.

*Grace Lutheran Church – Annual Reports for 1937.*

*Grace Lutheran Church: The History of Our Sunday School.* 1933.

*Grace Lutheran Messenger.* Nov. 1944.

Koehler, Luther. Interview – February 23, 2002.

Koehler, Luther. E-mail – April 22, 2002

Knoch, Eugene. Interview - April 13, 2002.

Marmur, Dorothy. Interview – April 15, 2002.

*Minutes from the January 21, 1946 Voters Meeting.*

*Official Directory and Handbook of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church 1924-25.*

*Pastor's Semi-Annual Report: Jan. 1, 1944 – June 30, 1944.*

*Quarterly Report.* June 30, 1945.

Swain, LaVern. Interview – April 13, 2002