

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church
Fountain City, WI.
1860 - 1987

Senior Church History

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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

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Mequon, Wisconsin

Introductory Remarks

The beginning of this congregation is closely intervoven with the trials and problems of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, of which this congregation is a member. The Synod grew and expanded along the shore of Lake Michigan, south from Milwaukee to Kenosha and north as far as Manitowoc, westward as far as Watertown, and northward from there to Fond du Lac. But in 1854 the spirit of unionism still prevailed. Congregations consisted of Lutheran and Reformed members; controversies arose as to ceremonies in the service, the use of the liturgy; disagreement as to the use of the host or the use of bread in the Lord's Supper. The subsequent years by God's grace brought a gradual turn to a more clearcut Lutheran practice. By 1857 Lutheran practice became more clearly defined. The Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin desired to become more Lutheran. That problem of unionism was also to affect the early years of this congregation.

St. Michael's was begun because of the Synod's interest in mission work. The first traveling missionary, Pastor Gottlieb Fachtmann, was to reach out to the scattered Lutheran imigrants. He was commissioned about ten years after the founding of the Synod. Pastor Fachtmann made missionary trips into what is today called the Fox River Valley in Wisconsin and into northeastern Wisconsin, and later into the western part of Wisconsin and into Minnesota. With his pack on his back, and a few religious books and equipment to conduct a house service, or to administer the Holy Supper of our Lord, Pastor Fachtmann set out as a traveling missionary.

Missionary Fachtmann in October 1857 was sent on an extended tour through the Fox and Wolf River valleys. He visited Fond du Lac, Neenah, Menasha, Hortonville, New London, and Belle Plaine. From Fond du Lac, where Pastor Fachtmann had become pastor in 1858, he came to LaCrosse, a village of maybe 600 people. In the interest of synodical missions he worked along the Mississippi River going north to Winona, Fountain City, Buffalo City and St. Paul and south to Plattville.

Thus the people who later were to form St. Michael's congregation were visited by the first missionary of the Wisconsin Synod.

Preaching the Gospel

Under this heading we will look at the 12 pastors who have served St. Michael's. This will be done by starting at the beginning of the congregation's history. In the early part of 1860, Rev. William Pahl, a German from the province of Pomerania, settled in Fountain City. Claiming to be a Lutheran pastor, he preached in the public schoolhouse and carried out the pastoral duties for both the Lutheran and Reformed people of the community. His immoral and godless living angered the people and his stay was terminated in about 6 months. So like the Synod itself, the congregation was forced to make a decision in what doctrinal direction they would go. The answer would come soon for them.

In the fall of 1860 the Wisconsin Synod, learning of this predicament, sent a young German pastor, E. Strube, to found a congregation. This then was the real beginning of the present church. The bad example set by Rev. William Pahl had disillusioned many and caused them to lose their faith, but with the help of the Lord, Pastor Strube and small number of Lutherans gladly and earnestly worked to overcome the obstacles and established a congregation of about thirty members. Among the surnames of the original thirty that are still represented in the congregation are Roettiger, Westerkamp, Schwark, Heuer, and Krause.

Pastor Strube formed a sister congregation at Buffalo City where he preached on alternate Sundays. They had already begun to build a church, but in Fountain City services were still conducted in the building that had formerly been used as a public schoolhouse. However, thoughts of the members were turning to acquiring a church building of their own. In spite of the fact that the congregation was small and the members were poor they decided to build. To expedite the building project, Pastor Strube undertook a collection tour among the Lutheran congregations along the Mississippi River. One hundred dollars of the \$188 that was collected went toward the construction that was under way at Buffalo City. The remainder, along with the money raised by the Fountain City congregation, totaled \$677.45; and the decision

was made to build in the summer of 1862.

At their annual meeting January 1, 1863, the congregation adopted a constitution, rules of order, and rules of faith. They voted to join the Wisconsin Synod. They also voted to apply to the state for articles of incorporation. These resolutions were signed by members of the church council - Pastor E. Strube, F. Westerkamp, D. Twerstrath, L. Dressenderfer, and H. Bechmann.

Pastor Strube had helped the congregation through its first struggling years. In 1874 he felt the congregation had rooted and stabilized itself so he could accept a call from a congregation at Newton, Manitowoc County, Wisconsin. The loved and respected pastor preached his farewell sermon on Sunday, July 26.

Because the Wisconsin Synod was unable to send a pastor; Johannes Hacker of the Iowa Synod accepted the call sent by the congregation. Pastor H. Lutz of Dubuque, Iowa, installed him; and the new pastor preached his initial sermon to St. Michael's congregation on October 25, 1874. The connection with the Wisconsin Synod was severed at that time, but on April 14, 1878, the congregation passed a resolution to rejoin the Synod. Pastor Hacker now also joined the Wisconsin Synod. During his six and a half year ministry Pastor Hacker clarified the congregation's concept of the Lutheran doctrine, and he introduced the fine liturgical order during the service which he had learned in school in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. Pastor Hacker preached his farewell sermon Easter Monday, 1881, after which he left for Leeds, Columbia County, Wisconsin, where he had accepted a call.

Pastor Hacker's successor, Pastor Bendix Phillip Nommensen of Buffalo City, was installed the second Sunday after Easter by Pastor D. Koch. He continued serving his former congregation at Buffalo City until they succeeded in getting Pastor John Freund. Pastor Nommensen was the first pastor to instruct and confirm a number of people in the English language. Occasionally he preached an English sermon. Having returned a number of calls during his six year stay, he accepted a call from St. Lucas' congregation in Milwaukee in 1887. The congregation heard his farewell

sermon on August 7 and wished him God's blessing in his new location.

Pastor A. F. Nicolaus of Baraboo, Wisconsin, succeeded Pastor Nommensen. He was installed by Pastor Philip Von Rohr on October 9, 1887, and preached his first sermon to St. Michael's congregation the following Sunday. On July 8, 1888, a revised church order was adopted. During his ministry the church in which the congregation celebrated its centennial was built. Having devoted seven years to ministering to the needs to St. Michael's congregation, Pastor Nicholas desired to accept a call to the Lutheran congregation at Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. The congregation granted his request November 25, 1894.

A call was then extended to Pastor Ludwig Pauch of Winside, Nebraska. He accepted the call and was installed as pastor of St. Michael's congregation on the third Sunday in Advent, 1894. The year 1900 marked the fortieth anniversary of the congregation and a jubilee was planned. However, this celebration did not completely materialize because in the meantime Pastor Rauch accepted a call from a congregation at Elroy, Wisconsin. His farewell sermon on August 29, 1900, terminated his five and a half year service in Fountain City.

The congregation then sent a call to Pastor August Vollbrecht of Stanton, Nebraska, On September 30, 1900, Pastor C. E. Reim installed the pastor who was to serve St. Michael's congregation for a period of forty years. His initial sermon was preached on October 7. Pastor Vollbrecht was here to help the congregation praise, thank, and honor God in 1910 when the golden jubilee was celebrated. The church council for that year was Fr. Putz, C. Meili, A. Schlawin, C. Schladinski and Pastor Vollbrecht.

The actual Jubilee celebration was held on October 2, 1910. All of the former pastors with the exception of Pastor Ludwig Rauch were able to attend. An amusing incident is recalled by members who attended that celebration. Pastor Strube, who by then was an aged man, was very lengthy in his remarks. Pastor Vollbrecht several times got the choir ready to sing, but Pastor Strube spoke on, reminiscing from time to time. Finally Pastor Vollbrecht interrupted him to say, "Der Hacker will auch noch sprechen" (Pastor Hacker wants to say a few words too); to which

he replied, "Mit dem dispensieren wir" (We'll dispense with him). To the congregation he said, "Pastor Vollbrecht sage ich sol jetzt aufheren aber das beste komt noch" (Pastor Vollbrecht says I should stop now, but the best is yet to come), and he continued.

The forty years of Pastor Vollbrecht's ministry were to bring many changes in the facilities the pastor had for administering to his congregation. From having Christmas Eve services by kerosene lamp light to using electricity and from driving a horse and buggy to services at Oak Valley to making the trip by Model T Ford were just some of the changes. World War I brought English church services into being although German services were more frequent for many years.

In 1925 when Pastor Vollbrecht had been here twenty-five years, the congregation decided to honor the pastor with a gift. At first they considered giving him an automobile, but because he did not know how to drive, they presented the money to him instead; whereupon he promptly purchased a shiny black Ford coupe, which he fondly called "Henry."

The year 1935 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the congregation, and in 1937 Pastor Vollbrecht's fifty years in the ministry was celebrated. In 1939 under Pastor Vollbrecht the Young People's Society was organized.

On January 1, 1940, Pastor Vollbrecht announced that he was planning to retire, and calls were to be placed for his successor. He preached his farewell sermon on October 13, 1940.

A call was extended to Pastor Herbert Nommensen of Prentice, Wisconsin; he was the grandson of a former pastor of the congregation. He accepted the call and was installed on December 8, 1940, by his father, Pastor William Nommensen. A dinner was given at the Fountain City Auditorium to welcome him.

During his ministry the envelope system for collection of church offerings was adopted. The small hymnals were replaced by the the Lutheran Hymnal of 1941. The church constitution was translated, revised, adopted and printed in booklet form. For the first time the annual report was printed and made available to every

member of the congregation. A Men's Club was organized and was an active organization during Pastor Nommensen's stay.

Until 1942 church services frequently were held in the German language. Because this was no longer practical, the custom was changed to having one German service a month. In 1949 German services were discontinued except for one service a month at the Home for the Aged.

Several big projects were undertaken during Pastor Nommensen's time at St. Michael's. The church basement was excavated and the church addition was built. The Home for the Aged was established. Pastor Nommensen's intense interest in the welfare of senior members of the congregation surely contributed to the success of this enterprise. The eighty-fifth anniversary of the founding of St. Michael's was celebrated at the mission festival in 1945.

A scholarship fund was established to encourage young men of the congregation to study for the ministry or Christian teaching. Two young men of the congregation took advantage of this, one of whom is Pastor Marvin Putz of Fond du Lac.

Members of the congregation had noted bulletins in various Lutheran churches they had attended while they were on vacation. The bulletins seemed to be a good idea and St. Michael's adopted the custom in September, 1947.

In 1948 Oak Valley, which had been maintained as a separate congregation, became a part of the Fountain City congregation.

A Married Couples' Club was formed in 1950 under the guidance of Pastor Nommensen. This organization was active until the departure of Pastor Nommensen.

On October 24, 1954, St. Michael's said farewell to the man and his family who had been with fourteen years. He had accepted a call to organize and manage a home for the aged in Milwaukee.

Until July, 1955, Pastor A. L. Mennicke of St. Matthew's in Winona took care of the congregation's needs. Harold Essmann, who was vicar at St. Matthew's, took over many of the services, and it was he with the young people of the congregation

who established the tradition of having an Easter Sunrise service. Also early in 1955 it was decided to sponsor radio broadcasts and to adopt the program of having a Lutheran Pioneer Club and a Lutheran Girl's Pioneer Club. During this interim Vacation Bible School was initiated under the direction of Pastor Mennicke. Pastor Herbert Scharlemann was with the congregation for this first two week Bible school.

After having been without a pastor for ten months, it was with great joy that the congregation welcomed Pastor Roland Welch and his family from Brodhead, Wisconsin. He was installed by Pastor Mennicke the evening of July 17, 1955.

The four years of Pastor Welch's ministration saw various changes and improvements. A telephone was installed in the study of the church and a tape recorder was used to record sermons for shut-ins. A duplicating machine was also purchased. A pledge system was set up for church offerings.

The Married Couples' Club was reorganized. Topics pertaining to Bible study or Christian living were part of every meeting. The club undertook buying the guest book and candle lighter, binding worn hymnals, and giving a play. The club remained active until Pastor Welch left.

The congregation got a blanket subscription to the Northwestern Lutheran and when the new daily devotional booklet, Meditations, was published, the congregation subscribed to it. A board of education was established, and it was decided in 1958 to have a kindergarten in the church basement as a first step toward a Christian Day school.

The Decker lot across the street from the church was purchased. The need for a new parsonage was discussed from time to time, and in 1957 a parsonage committee made up of Warren Roettiger, Frank Vandewalker, and John Putz was appointed. At that time the first steps for celebrating St. Michael's centennial were taken. Duane Baertsch, William Kochenderfer, and Ludwig Tamke were elected to serve on the centennial committee. Others appointed to this committee later were C. H. W. Andres, Vincent Kammuller, Mrs. Willard Heuer, and Miss Alberta Thaldorf.

In the spring of 1959 Pastor Welch received a call to Arenzville, Illinois, which he decided to accept. His farewell sermon was given July 5 at which time the congregation expressed their thanks and farewells at a pot luck dinner.

Pastor Rudolph Korn served as vacancy pastor in the six months that followed. Plans were made to build a new parsonage on the same site as the former parsonage.

Late in 1959 the congregation was pleased to learn that Pastor Harold Essmann, whom they had come to know during his work with them nearly five years earlier, had accepted the call extended to him while he was serving as missionary in Northern Rhodesia, Africa. Pastor Essmann was installed the evening of January 3, 1960. The installation was followed by a simple reception in the church basement.

The first Sunday in May, 1960, marked the beginning of the use of individual cups for Holy Communion. This new communion ware consisted of silver serving trays, individual communion glasses, and a silver bread plate.

At the time of the centennial it is interesting to note that 2,375 baptisms had been performed, 1,249 confirmations, 625 marriages and 991 Burials. Since there are some very old church records for this time period, I thought this would be a good place to list a summary of official church acts for the first one hundred years.

Pastor Essmann, who was the pastor at the time of the Centennial, remained until 1965. His farewell sermon was on December 26, 1965. His next pastorate was at Waterloo, Wisconsin, where he still is presently. The vacancy was again served by Pastor Mennicke for the next 8 months.

On September 4, 1966 Pastor Cleone Weigand was installed at St. Michael's. He was to continue to serve until Thanksgiving of 1977. One of the significant items to note during his ministry was Zion Congregation of Cream joining St. Michael's thus making it a dual parish. This took place in 1971. During Thanksgiving of 1977 Pastor Weigand accepted a call to Redemption in Milwaukee.

Pastor Frederick Mutterer was installed as the next pastor on January 22, 1978. He had previously been serving in Middleton, Wisconsin. He has continued to serve since then.

Building the Church

The first church building was a frame structure with no steeple. It was dedicated November 9, 1862. Various additions and improvements were made on and in the building during the twenty-eight years that it was in use. A room was built in the church basement which served as a classroom for the confirmation classes. This addition brought the cost of the building to \$838. In 1865 a church spire was added to the church at a cost of \$433 and was dedicated October 8th. A small pipe organ was purchased for \$400.

In April, 1872, a balcony was built in the church, and in November, 1872, a new bell costing \$415 was mounted in the spire. It was shipped by railroad from St. Louis to Winona because river navigation had already been closed for the year. Mr. Lorenz Dressendorfer got the bell from Winona with his ox team.

Some time during 1888 or 1889 it was decided to build a new church since the old church was in a state of deterioration that would be too costly to repair. In 1890 a new brick church with a one hundred foot spire was built. The church was thirty-two by fifty feet not including the altar niche and sacristy. Maybury and Son were the architects and the building contract was let to Louis Kraft of Winona. However, much of the work was done by local builders, Schwark and Clausen and H. and F. Roettiger. The church was equipped with hot air heating. The entire cost of the building came to \$4,951. Sunday, November 16, 1890, was a happy day. People from neighboring congregations joined St. Michael's at the dedication of the almost debt free church.

In 1899 a clock was installed in the church tower. Dedication of the clock took place on November 5th.

In 1900 it was decided to decorate the church as a forty year jubilee.

offering. Moebius and Giverson did excellent work at a cost of nearly \$400.

Illu^{min}ation in the church had been provided by kerosene lamps during the first forty or fifty years. The first chandelier had been replaced by a larger and more elaborate one. Sometime between 1902 and 1910 the church was wired for electricity.

The year 1910 marked St. Michael's fiftieth anniversary. A celebration was planned in thankfulness and appreciation of the rich blessing that had filled those years. A new pipe organ was purchased from the Seybold Organ Company of Elgin, Illinois, through the firm of F. Bohri and Son.

The ladies of the congregation raised enough money to buy a red carpet for the chancel. The Ladies' Aid bought a new bell to replace the one that had cracked. The firm of Stuckstede and Brothers of St. Louis, which had sold them the old bell in 1872, now provided the new bell. On Sunday, August 28, 1910, the new bell was hoisted into the tower and dedicated to the service of God. The bell, which still hangs in the belfry, weighs 975 pounds and with the bell cradle weighs 1400 pounds. It carries the inscription 1860-1910.

The church had no basement when it was first constructed, but a small basement was dug under the rear part of the church, probably after 1910. During the process of excavating, a spring was uncovered; and water from it was used until further excavation was made many years later.

In 1935 the church was given a new look by being completely redecorated. Inlaid linoleum^u was laid over the entire church floor.

The light fixtures, contributed by the Young People's Society, were installed in 1942. The church^h had been rewired the previous year. In 1944 the pulpit was lowered for the first time and the canopy was removed.

The year 1947 bought the last major change. The entire area under the church was excavated; **and** the spring, which had been a supply of water for so many years, was closed to provide a complete basement to be used for Sunday School and meetings of the various church organizations. An addition was built on the south

side of the church which included a furnace room and kitchen on the basement level and a mother's room and wash rooms on the upstairs level. The floors on this upstairs level were covered with tile. The Ladies' Aid furnished the stove, cupboards, counters, dishes, and dining room tables for the basement. Light fixtures in the basement were given by the Young People's Society. This addition was dedicated October 8, 1948, during the regular worship service.

In 1948 shrubbery was planted in front of the church, and the stone bulletin board was constructed. A new lectern now graced the chancel. In 1949 a metal railing was placed on the steps of the addition.

In 1952 plans were under discussion for redecorating the interior of the church. It was voted to replace the old colored windows with new art glass windows. The pipe organ was no longer in good condition so the church council was to investigate the purchase of a new organ. After trying several different organs in Sunday services, A Hammond electric organ was favored and its purchase ensued. By September, 1954, the complete redecorating of the church interior was an accomplished fact. Green carpeting covered the chancel floor and the center church aisle. The walls of the church proper were painted pale green; whereas the chancel walls were painted shades of rose with blue panels decorated with simple Christian motifs.

A rack for weekly bulletins and church tracts was built and put into use by July, 1956. Another improvement that was made earlier that same year was the new altar rail, which matched other appointments in the chancel. In June, 1957, a new hymn number board was purchased and put into use, and a Bible stand for the pulpit was added in 1958. Also the 1958 the mechanism of the clock in the church tower was converted to electricity.

During the centennial year the steeple was repaired and painted, and members of the congregation painted the exterior trim. A stainless steel cross replaced the old one on the steeple. It was decided to convert the furnace from coal to an oil burning unit, and the Ladies' Aid provided funds that the interior walls and ceilings

of the church might be washed.

Providing for the Pastor

The first pastor of St. Michael's congregation had living quarters that were in great contrast to the new parsonage which was dedicated at the centennial. During the first years of his pastorate Pastor Strube and his family lived in the basement rooms of the church.

In 1865 the congregation bought the lot adjoining the church for a parsonage; however, it wasn't until 1870 that a brick parsonage was built on this lot at a cost of \$850.

Thirteen years later on May 6, 1883, it was decided to build an addition to the parsonage. Rooms were added on the first floor to create more living space, and a school room was added upstairs. The contract for this twenty by twenty-eight addition was given to Heinrich Roettiger. This construction cost \$838.10.

In 1892 further improvements were made on the church property. A new retaining wall was erected and a new barn was built. Two pumps, one for well water and one for rain water, were provided.

There is no record of any other ~~ha~~ changes in the parsonage property until 1940 when the parsonage was repaired and redecorated in preparation for Pastor and Mrs. Herbert Nommensen. The old barn had become too small to use for a garage, so in 1941 the balance of the basement of the parsonage was excavated and a garage was built in the basement.

By 1943 a new roof was needed; asbestos shingles replaced the old ones. Other improvements were made in 1944, which included a new furnace and some additional plumbing in the basement.

The parsonage was redecorated in July, 1955, just prior to the arrival of the Welch family. Sometime later the old school room was repainted and rewired for use by the Walther League and the Sunday School.

The possibilities of remodeling the old structure were discussed in 1956, but it was decided that no more money was to be spent on it in the hope that a new parsonage could be built in the near future.

In the summer of 1957 a parsonage committee was appointed consisting of Warren Roettiger, Frank Vandewaler, and John Putz. At first some thought was given to purchasing one of the several houses that were available at the time.

Not much progress was made until October, 1959, when it was recommended that a new parsonage should be built on the old lot. In January, 1960, the old parsonage was dismantled by some men from the congregation. Charles Guenther supervised this work. By the end of February this work was completed and an auction was held of the materials that were salvaged. The new parsonage was constructed and landscaped by H. and F. Roettiger and Company, and Norman Ratz installed the plumbing and heating.

Members of the congregation pledged enough money to be given over a period of three years to make ~~the~~ the new parsonage a reality. The parsonage finance committee was made up on Vincent Kammuehler, Chairman; Gerald Thaalder, treasurer; Henry Ernst, Jr., Glenn Haeuser, Willard Heuer, and Duane Baertsch.

The completed home has eight rooms. ~~A~~Living room, dining room, kitchen, study, bedroom, and bath comprise the first floor. Three bedrooms, a hall, and a bath occupy the second floor. The garage is located in the basement. The outside walls are covered at the eaves with brick facing; whereas the gables and dormers are covered with white siding. The estimated cost of this new parsonage was \$27,000.00.

Thus it is that St. Michael's congregation began their second century with a comfortable new home for the pastor and his family.

Gathering the Parts

The Oak Valley congregation which later became a branch of St. Michael's began probably even earlier than the Fountain City congregation. At first services were

held in the Karl Suhr home; later services were held in the Oak Valley schoolhouse. Pastor E. Strube served Buffalo City, Fountain City, and Oak Valley from 1860 to 1871.

During these early years the Oak Valley congregation was sometimes served by a pastor from Buffalo City. With the departure of Pastor Strube a Pastor Koehler ministered to the needs of the people. He walked from Buffalo City once a month to conduct these services. The only exception to his walking were those times when the people had time from their work to get him.

Pastor Koehler was succeeded by Pastor B. P. Nommensen, who came to Buffalo City in 1876. With the coming of Pastor Nommensen a constitution was adopted, and the church became known as Trinity Lutheran Church. At this time the congregation began to keep church records. From 1881 to 1883 Pastor Nommensen served all three congregations - Buffalo City, Oak Valley and Fountain City.

When Pastor John Freund came to Buffalo City in 1883, he also took over the services in Oak Valley. He left in 1888 and from that time on pastors from St. Michael's served Trinity at Oak Valley.

Pastor A. F. Nicolaus came to Oak Valley for services from 1889 to 1894 when he was succeeded by Pastor Ludwig Rauch, who stayed until 1900. A Sunday School was held during the years of Pastor Nicolaus' ministry. Pastor Rauch was the only pastor to conduct a separate mission festival at Oak Valley.

During all these years the congregation had no officers. The pastors were obliged to collect the church dues themselves. With the coming of Pastor August Vollbrecht a new order began. A treasurer was chosen, Albert W. Suhr. He served in that capacity until Trinity no longer existed as a separate entity. Mr. Suhr recalled that two to four dollars was a typical contribution by a family to the church for a year.

Now services were held once every three weeks and on holidays about 2:00p.m. An hour was the pastor's traveling time from Fountain City to Oak Valley when road

conditions were favorable. At other times he would go as far as ^{the} road was passable and then walk the remaining distance.

Under Pastor Vollbrecht, C. H. W. Andres reorganized the Sunday School in 1900. A Christmas program on Christmas night was an annual event. The Sunday School continued until about 1912.

The first school building was razed and replaced by a new structure in the summer of 1907. Services were then held in the new building.

Pastor Vollbrecht alternated German and English services, but throughout the last years they were all English.

The chandeliers with kerosene lamps that had been moved from St. Michael's church to the schoolroom in the parsonage were finally used in the Oak Valley School. The year 1938 marked the end of the kerosene lamp era when REA brought electricity to the rural school.

A reed organ had been purchased by the local Literary Society and was available for church as well as for school use. For many years Mrs. Vollbrecht played the organ; and when she no longer accompanied the pastor to these services, he himself played. Mice finally got in ^{the} toe organ and chewed up the felt pads. A piano replaced the organ and during the last few years of Pastor Vollbrecht's ministry Mrs. Ervin Schreiber assisted as pianist.

It is interesting to note that only once in forty years did Pastor Vollbrecht forget a service at Oak Valley.

At the turn of the century attendance was about thirty or thirty-five. In earlier years the number was greater, but by the time Pastor Herbert Nommensen came in 1940, attendance was down to approximately fifteen. The services did, however, continue until the school was consolidated with the Cochrane school in 1948. At that time the congregation became a part of St. Michael's. Very shortly after that the school building was razed.

Caring for the Aged

St. Michael's Evangelical Lutheran Home for the Aged is situated on a beautiful wooded area overlooking the city of Fountain City. It is a residential home intended to meet the needs of elderly people who are ambulatory and is open to all residents of the community today; however, members of St. Michael's have priority for entrance.

In 1947 Fred Roettiger, who built the original residence, suggested converting the residence into a home for the aged. This idea grew with Pastor Herbert Nommensen and the church's members and the home was opened in October of the same year.

At a regular meeting of the congregation Donald Haeuser and Melvin Conrad were elected to investigate the possibilities of converting the residence into a home for the aged. These men in turn appointed Ethan Kochenderfer and Vincent Kammuller, who together with Pastor Herbert Nommensen comprised the first board of the Home. The members of St. Michael's gave pledges and contributions that the purchase of the Home became an actuality. The cost of ~~the~~ original home and furnishings was \$8,500.

In addition to the men previously mentioned board members, Ludwig Tamke and Glenn Haeuser gave much of their time to create and maintain a successful Home.

The success of the Home was further assured with the presence of Deaconess Martha Herzberg, who had devoted many years as matron of a Wisconsin Synod operated home at Belle Plaine, Minnesota. Her knowledge and experience gained at Belle Plaine was a tremendous value in beginning St. Michael's Home. The first six months she gave her time and service without remuneration. Deaconess Herzberg dedicated herself to the guests of the Home until illness forced her to retire in March, 1953, after five years of service.

The next deaconess was Ida Stolte, who devoted a year and one half to the Home. Succeeding her was Deaconess Louise Hoehlenbrock, who came in July, 1954, and remained until her marriage to Pastor Rudolph Korn in October, 1959. Replacing her was Mrs. Eleanor Sing, who though not a deaconess, ably served the residents.

The original Home had adequate facilities for the care of nine people. In 1953

an addition was built to accomodate four additional residents. The cost of that project was \$11,000. Since then the Home has grown considerably. Since then there have been three additional expansions. In 1955 the number of beds was increased from 13 to 27 and in 1965 the number of beds was increased to 47 beds. The last major expansion was in 1982 at a cost of slightly over \$400,000.00 Due to much stricter regulations 13 beds were replaced as a part of a new updated wing and eight additional beds were added bringing the total number up to 55. A fund drive was used to raise money for this project. It was entitled "Giving Today ensures Tomorrow"; although \$300,000 dollars was borrowed for this project, it was paid off within several years due in large part of the great generosity of members of the community-at-large, who had benefited from the Home in some way or another.

Today the Nursing Home is registered as a licensed Skilled Care Nursing Facility. Total assets are listed at 875,000 dollars. There are approximately forty people on its payroll today making it the third largest employer in the city.

With the physical growth of the Nursing Home has also come administrative growth. For a number of years during the 1960's the pastor at St. Michael's served as Home Administrator. Finally, due to the pressing number of duties other men were chosen to do this work. In 1970 from July to December Tom Haney served as a part-time Administrator. Then Allen Engel and Curtis Ellefson served in this position also for a short time. Since then the Home has been richly blessed with Mrs. Shirley Steckel as our Fulltime Administrator. She started working at the Home in 1965 and has ably served the Home for many years. Today the Pastor of St. Michael's serves as the chairman of the Board for the Home.

Teaching the Children

Sunday School has been a part of the training of the children of St. Michael's since its inception in one form or another. Some of the people who have served as Sunday School superintendents or Presidents have been Andrew Dressendor.

who served for the first fifty years in the position, Miss Ruth Kammueler, Mrs. Rueben Baertsch and Harry J. Putz.

Vacation Bible School was begun in July, 1955. It was started by Pastor Mennicke of Winona during the vacancy. It has continued to be offered since then, although it now is a one week program instead of the original two weeks.

Confirmation ^{class} also was not always taught on Saturdays as it has been done since 1940. For many years confirmation instruction was given four days a week Monday through Thursday from nine until three thirty with an hour for lunch. Rural children roomed and boarded with families in town. As more children desired to attend high school it was made possible for these students to use their free hours to leave high school to come to the schoolroom in the parsonage for instruction. They attended confirmation class for just one year before being confirmed. The class of 1939-1940 was in the transition period, and these young people attended confirmation class on Wednesday and Saturday of each week for a year.

The daily Lutheran kindergarten was established in September, 1958, to bring both sacred and secular learning to pre-first grade children. The kindergarten was started as a forerunner of a Christian Day School for all eight grades. That dream was to take another fifteen years to fulfill. Following is a list of the teachers who served in this capacity and the number of students:

			1958	Mrs. Schlawin	10
1959	Mrs. Wallace Schlawin	10	1967	Susan Westendorf	16
1960	Mrs. Carl Bartels	11	1968	Susan Westendorf	14
1961	Mrs. William Powell	14	1969	Susan Westendorf	14
1962	Mrs. Kieckbush	10	1970	Susan Westendorf	14
1963	Charlene Kutz	16	1971	Susan Westendorf	14
1964	Charlene Kutz	16	1972	Susan Westendorf	16
1965	Roseance Hartwig	19	1973	The grade school was	
1966	Susan Westendorf	13		begun at Cochrane	

The grade school begun in Cochrane was to be a four congregational venture. It was started here because of the additional land that the Cochrane church possessed. On August 1, 1971, a school association was formed which, until only a few years ago, consisted of members of the churches. Today, all the churches except the one at Cochrane are a part of the association and the school is supported out of the budget.

The first two teachers of the school were Mr. Ralph Miller, who was assigned from DMLC and a Mrs. Darwin Fetting. Both of these teachers faithfully taught until the conclusion of the 1977-1978 school year. For the next school year the principal and upper grades teacher was called from DMLC, Mr. Punke and Mrs. F. Mutterer replaced Mrs. Fetting. For the 1986-87 school year an additional teacher was called to be the kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Blake Seitz. The enrollment for the last three or four years has been around 40 children. A pre-school was begun in 1985 which has met with success.

Working for the Lord

The congregation has been blessed with other programs as well. The Ladies' Aid was begun on October 6, 1889. This first organization lasted for six years. It was again begun in June, 1903 and has remained to this present day.

The Young People's Society was begun in 1939 and met with success during the war years, but was discontinued in 1954. In 1955 it was again reorganized and in June of 1957 joined with the Walther League International and became known as St. Michael's Walther League. At the present time it has been discontinued due to lack of eligible members.

Both Lutheran Girl Pioneers and Boy Pioneers was organized in 1955 and were able to meet with a degree of success for some years. At present there is again some discussion and effort to get these groups started again.

Outlook for the Future

Externally, the church building has undergone little change in the last forty years. The parking lot has been improved with a retaining wall and pitched roof put over the mother's room, which now has a dropped ceiling, but little else has changed.

What has changed has been the number of members at St. Michael's Lutheran Church. This has gone down dramatically.

1956	Souls	529	Communicants	372
1966	Souls	500	Communicants	375
1976	Souls	385	Communicants	327
1986	Souls	354	Communicants	281

The drastic ten year drop between 1966 and 1976 can be attributed to several factors. Certainly, the congregation drew older and many members died. Many of the children left and began to move away from the area finding work in the Twin Cities or somewhere else. The population of Fountain City has gone down and the small type farming community has been hit hard by today's economics. But also, due at least in part, the decline in membership can be attributed to the congregations's lack of zeal to provide for its younger members over the years. The newest church in town, the United Church of Christ, has benefited from this lack of commitment for the future on the part of St. Michael's.

Hopefully, with a growing interest in the school and a renewed zeal on the part of some of the members St. Michael's will again be able to grow as it continues its second century of service to the Lord.