

THE OTHER WISCONSIN SYNOD CHURCH

Part 1: A Short History of GOOD SHEPHERD EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, Beaver Dam, Wi.

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March, 1950. Pastor Alwin Degner of St. John's Town Trenton accepts a call from the Western Wisconsin District Mission Board of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to organize a congregation on the north side of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. The voters of St. Stephen's Ev. Luth. Church, an established Wisconsin Synod congregation in this city, gave the endeavour unanimous support. Pastor Degner remained resident pastor at St. John's.

April 23, 1950. The members of this new congregation worship together for the first time on this date. They met in the residence at 1300 North Center Street. Later, services moved to a converted garage at 414 Liberty Street. It was Good Shepherd Sunday.

June, 1950. Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church is organized formally in the first week of this month. The congregation and mission board quickly began plans to build at the southwest corner of Denning Avenue and North Center Street. Drs. A.A. and George Hoyer donated the 244 by 231 site in memory of their parents, Pastor and Mrs. Edward Hoyer.

December 28, 1950. Construction of the church begins on this date. The structure, built with a basement and seating for 125, cost approximately \$25,000.

March 4, 1951. Good Shepherd lays the cornerstone for its new church on this date. Pastor Kirst of St. Stephen's assisted Pastor Degner with the ceremony.

August 26, 1951. The church structure, completed in May, is dedicated on this date. In its first year and a half Good Shepherd showed slow growth. The congregation and mission board began to consider calling a resident pastor.

July 6, 1952. Pastor Degner ordains and installs Eugene Kitzerow, a May graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, on this date. Pastor Kitzerow is Good Shepherd's first resident pastor.

1950-1954. These are years of rather slow growth for Good Shepherd. In 1950 the congregation began with 71 baptized souls. Three and a half years later it reported 108 souls.

Summer, 1955. Pastor Kitzerow accepts a call to the Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Marvin Zank of this same Nebraska District accepts the call to Good Shepherd. After Pastor Kitzerow's departure, Pastor Alwin Degner again served Good Shepherd, this time in the interim as vacancy pastor.

August 28, 1955. On this date, Pastor Degner installs Marvin Zank as Good Shepherd's second resident pastor.

September, 1958. After nearly three years of planning and construction, Good Shepherd completes the parsonage at 609 Denning Avenue on property adjoining the church site.

1955-1959. These are years of great prosperity for Good Shepherd. The trend of slow growth in the early years reversed itself and membership grew rapidly to 309 baptized souls in 1959. Also, the congregation went self-supporting in 1959. Good Shepherd became an established, supporting member of the Wisconsin Synod.

August, 1961. Teacher Sylvia Nass, called by Good Shepherd, begins her service on the faculty at St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran School. Teacher Nass was Good Shepherd's first grade school teacher.

Fall, 1963. Pastor Zank accepts a call to Medford, Wisconsin, also in the Western Wisconsin District. After his departure, Pastor Walter Zank of St. John's Town Trenton served Good Shepherd during the vacancy.

June 28, 1964. Pastor R.H. Roth ordains and installs Ronald Roth, a May graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, on this date. Pastor Roth was Good Shepherd's third resident pastor. He came after a nine month vacancy.

August, 1965. Teacher Carol Smith, called after Teacher Nass' departure, begins her service on the faculty at St. Stephen's. Teacher Smith was Good Shepherd's second grade school teacher.

1960-1966. Though Good Shepherd's numbers level off somewhat during these years, its growth continues. In 1966 the congregation reported 402 baptized souls. Nearly half of the numerical increase came from adult confirmations. Considering the situation, Good Shepherd formed a Planning Commission in early 1966 to evaluate the future needs of the congregation.

August, 1966. Teacher Arlene Weiss, called after Teacher Smith's departure, begins her service on the faculty at St. Stephen's. Teacher Weiss was Good Shepherd's third grade school teacher.

January, 1967. Concerned about outgrowing their facilities and acting on the evaluations of the Planning Commission, the voters of Good Shepherd elect a five member Church Building Council.

May, 1968. The Church Building Council presents the master plan for a new church structure to the congregation's voters. The plan is approved.

April, 1969. Good Shepherd burns the mortgage on its parsonage. For the first time in its history the congregation is debt free.

October, 1969. Construction of the new church edifice begins during this month. The structure--built with offices, meeting room, narthex, etc. and seating for 362--cost approximately \$125,000. The congregation laid the cornerstone seven months later and finished construction after nine months in July, 1970. The 1951 church building remained in use as a fellowship hall and Sunday School classrooms.

July 12, 1970. Good Shepherd dedicates the new church plant on this date. Baptized membership approached 500 souls.

August, 1970. Teacher Patricia Thompson, called after Teacher Weiss' departure, begins her service on the faculty at St. Stephen's. Teacher Thompson was Good Shepherd's fourth grade school teacher.

January-February, 1971. Pastor Roth accepts a call to the Nebraska District. Pastor Larry Cooper of the Minnesota District accepts the call to Good Shepherd.

May 23, 1971. Pastor James Schaefer installs Larry Cooper as Good Shepherd's fourth resident pastor.

1967-1972. Good Shepherd's encouraging growth continues during these years. By the end of 1972 membership has swelled to 645 souls. Though the number of adult confirmations has dropped somewhat, the congregation's future looks very promising.

September 2, 1973. Teacher Fred Pingel, called after Teacher Thompson's departure, began his service on St. Stephen's faculty in August. On this date, Pastor Cooper installs him as Good Shepherd's fifth grade school teacher.

August, 1975. Good Shepherd observes the congregation's 25th Anniversary.

Summer, 1981. Pastor Cooper accepts a call to the Michigan District. After his departure, Pastor Walter Goers of Friedens, Randolph served Good Shepherd during the vacancy.

1973-1981. These years prove to be very difficult for Good Shepherd. Friction between members and the pastor laid a heavy burden on the congregation. The number of adult confirmations continued to decline and baptized membership dropped below 500 by 1981. In the summer of 1981 pastor and congregation parted in the hope that both ministries could make a fresh start.

November 22, 1981. Pastor Kurtis Mau, called to Good Shepherd earlier this fall from Altura, MN of the Western Wisconsin District, is installed by Pastor Goers on this date. Pastor Mau is Good Shepherd's fifth resident pastor.

1982-1986. These also are not been easy years for Good Shepherd. A number of families, dissatisfied with the pastor's departure in 1981, also leave the congregation. The result is that membership declines even further. God's work, however, continues. The number of adult confirmations has increased. The rapid drop in attendance and membership in the early 80s has begun to ease. Stewardship and evangelism committees have formed. And in 1984 the congregation began looking into another building project to add a fellowship-education addition. Despite a decade and a half of difficulties, Good Shepherd is working to ensure the future of their congregation, and of their Lord's work.

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Part 2: A Short Topical History of  
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**ORIGINS:** St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church has served confessional Lutherans in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin since 1875. This church, down through the years, has remained true to God's Word and a faithful member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Why then did the Wisconsin Synod sponsor a mission at Beaver Dam in 1950? By 1947 St. Stephen's had grown to 1900 souls. The church edifice, now 27 years old, needed repair. In that year and again in 1950 St. Stephen's made extensive repairs and improvements on the building. Expansion, however, was not a part of the renovations, though the congregation's expanding numbers may have called for it. Instead, Pastor L.C. Kirst and St. Stephen's encouraged the Western Wisconsin District Mission Board to establish a mission on Beaver Dam's north side with a nucleus of St. Stephen's members from that area. On June 27, 1950 Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church officially incorporated with the following as signatories: Frank E. Fecht, Walter Falk Jr., Clarence Neumann. The voters of St. Stephen's unanimously endorsed the new mission. Pastor Kirst assisted Good Shepherd's pastor, Alwin Degner, with the organization and early ceremonies of the congregation. The relationship between the two congregations has remained helpful and cordial throughout their histories.

**DEDICATION TO THE KINGDOM'S WORK:** Considering Good Shepherd's origins, there can be little doubt about the congregation's dedication to the work of spreading the Gospel. In 1952 the church still had under 100 souls. Pastor Degner could easily meet their needs while serving his own congregation in Town Trenten seven miles north of Beaver Dam. This situation, however, did not allow for active evangelism. Though the synod faced severe manpower shortages in these years, the congregation and mission board called seminary graduate Eugene Kitzerow. Congregation and pastor began the Lord's work together. Good Shepherd's concern for outreach continued long after Pastor Kitzerow was called away. The number of adult confirmations increased with the years, not the reverse. Both building projects were at least partially motivated by the need to spread the Word and give those who listen a chance to hear more. In all, Good Shepherd has confirmed over 100 adult converts in its 36 years, and continued to feed the souls of well over 2000 Christians.

**COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:** In any given mission report from the district proceedings, the mission in Beaver Dam received perhaps three or four sentences. Only matters of extreme importance received space. One of those sentences in the 1956 proceedings for the Western Wisconsin District reads, "A better parochial school arrangement is needed." Already in its early years the congregation was concerned about the Christian education of its children. The congregation, assisted by synod subsidy, paid a portion of the tuition costs for its children to attend St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran School. Although this situation remained difficult from the start, no basic changes were made in the agreement with St. Stephen's until 1961. In that year, Good Shepherd called and supported a teacher, who served at St. Stephen's in lieu of tuition payments. Good Shepherd has sent as many as 40 students to St. Stephen's in a single year. Sunday School enrollment has occasionally gone over 100, and seldom below 30. The congregation has organized a vacation Bible school since 1968, and conducted adult Bible class since the congregation's early years. Christian education has been and remains a commitment of Good Shepherd.

THE COST OF DISSENSION: The 1970s and early 80s were very difficult years for Good Shepherd. Because of severe disagreements between the pastor and members of the congregation, a great deal of the church's energy was spent on resolving the difficulties. It is still, perhaps, too soon to report the details of these painful years. Most of the parties involved remain members-in-good-standing of the Wisconsin Synod, though few are still members of Good Shepherd. The pastor made several changes in the congregation's life and worship which upset a number of the members. Accusations that the pastor sympathized with the Protestant Conference (an organization of Lutherans not in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, which is characterized by extreme disdain for the Wisconsin Synod's structure and "bureaucracy" and by dislike for systematized theology such as the catechism) and ongoing hostilities caused the circuit pastor and district president to intervene for the sake of unity. While they found no grounds to discipline the pastor or any other member, it became clear that the only solution for this matter might be the pastor's departure. Soon after, the pastor did accept a call away from Good Shepherd. The spectre of these years remains with Good Shepherd. Many active members left either because they could not tolerate the pastor's policies, or because they did not wish to remain in the church after the pastor had gone. The congregation was nearly crippled. The future, however, is ahead for Good Shepherd. As the previous section of this paper has pointed out, the present pastor and people have begun to put the past behind them. It is the prayer of this writer that the Lord will give Good Shepherd success in the difficult work ahead.

## SOURCES

The statistics have been taken from the Statistical Reports of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, 1947-present; bulletins and church records at Good Shepherd.

The historical facts have been taken from the Proceedings of the Western Wisconsin District, 1948-present; bulletins and church records at Good Shepherd; news clippings from the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen; 1969 bond brochure; 1986 Handbook for Good Shepherd; The Northwestern Lutheran, August 30, 1970; conversations with Pastor Mau and several members of Good Shepherd.